

CHAPTER 3

DEMAND FOR STATEHOOD AND OTHER FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR KARBI MILITANCY

3.1 Introduction

The present Karbi Anglong district is situated in the central part of Assam. The territory is bounded by Golaghat in the east, Meghalaya and Morigaon in the west, Nagaon and Golaghat district in the north and North Cachar Hills and Nagaland in the South. Within the undivided Assam, United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district was created vide Government Notification No. TAD/R/31/151 on November 17, 1951. The United Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills District Council was founded on June 23, 1952 with its headquarter at Diphu to carry out district administration. The Mikir Hills District was again rechristened as 'Karbi Anglong District' vide Government Notification No. TAD/R/115/74/47 on October, 14, 1976. At present Karbi Anglong is the largest among the 27 administrative districts in Assam with a total population of 965, 280. The district ranks 16th in respect of population and 451th among the 640 districts in India as per 2011 Census. The Table 3.1 shows the over view data of Karbi Anglong district.

Table 3.1: Overview Data of Karbi Anglong District

Head	Unit	As per 2011 Census
Geographical Area	Sq. Km	10, 434
Population	Number	956,313
Male	Number	490,167
Female	Number	466,146
Decadal Growth	Percentage	17.58%
Density of population	Per Sq. Km	92
Literacy	Percentage	69.25%
Male Literacy	Percentage	76.14%
Female Literacy	Percentage	62.00%
Sex ratio	Female per 1000 male	951
Child Population	0-6 years	151,681
Child Sex ratio	Male (0-6 years)	77,428
	Female (0-6 years)	74,253
Rural Population	Percentage	88.19%
Urban Population	Percentage	11.81%

Source: Directorate of Census Operation in Assam 2011

The population of this district is predominatly tribal. The ethnic groups of this district are Karbis, Dimasas, Rengma Nagas, Bodos, Kukis, Garos, Tiwas, Man-tai, etc. Karbi occupies the major population in the district. The district has total geographical

areas of 10, 434 sq kilometers which is comparatively equivalent to the island of Hawaii.¹⁰⁴ The district with dense tropical forest covering hills and plains is situated between 25°33' and 26°35' North Latitudes and 92°10' and 93°50' East Longitudes.

The Karbi Anglong district is one of the Autonomous Hill district of Assam constituted under the provisions of Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The pattern of administration in the hill district is different from that of the plain districts of Assam.

The district is divided into twenty-six constituencies namely (1) Duar amla, (2) Amri, (3) Chinthong, (4) Socheng, (5) Rongkhang, (6) Bithung Rengthama, (7) Kopili, (8) Hamren, (9) Amreng, (10) Howraghat, (11) Langpher, (12) Phuloni, (13) Langhin, (14) Korkanthi, (15) Mahamaya, (16) Nomati, (17) Socheng-Dhenta, (18) Lumbajong, (19) Dhansiri, (20) Singhason (21) Borjan, (22) Sarupathar, (23) Bokajan, (24) Deopani, (25) Nilip and (26) Duarbagori.

The district has again separated into three sub-divisions namely Bokajan and Hamren with its headquarters at Bokajan and Hamren respectively and the Diphu Sadar Sub- Division with its head quarter at Diphu for administrative convenience. The names of eleven Development Blocks in the district with its sub-division and headquarter is given in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Names Development Blocks with its Head Quarter and Sub- Division in Karbi Anglong

Sl. No.	Name of Blocks	Head Quarter	Sub-Division
1	Lumbajong	Manja	Diphu Sadar Sub-Division
2	Lansomepi	Bakolia	Diphu Sadar Sub-Division
3	Howraghat	Howraghat	Diphu Sadar Sub-Division
4	Samelangso	Samelangso	Diphu Sadar Sub-division
5	Bokajan	Bokajan	Bokajan Civil Sub-Division
6	Nilip	Chokihola	Bokajan Civil Sub-Division
7	Rongmongve	Rongmongve	Bokajan Civil Sub-Division
8	Socheng	Zerikindeng	Hamren Civil Sub-Division
9	Rongkhang	Dongkamukam	Hamren Civil Sub-Division
10	Chinthong	Hamren	Hamren Civil Sub-Division
11	Amri	Ulukunchi	Hamren Civil Sub-Division

Source: www.karbianglong.nic.in (accessed on 12/03/15)

Karbi is a tribe belonging to the Mongoloid origin and linguistically to the Tibeto-Burman family. Karbis are found in present Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh of northeast India and Sylhet of Bangladesh. They are predominantly settled in

¹⁰⁴ Profile of Karbi Anglong district http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karbi_Anglong

the state of Assam. Different tribes inhabiting north-east India (including Karbi tribe) are considered to have common ancestry and common history of migration.

The Karbis claimed that:

- a. Ethnically and linguistically the Karbis constitute a distinct people.
- b. In religion, majority of the Karbis were Animists, though few accepted Christianity and while others have adapted to other forms of religions.
- c. The Karbis have a distinct social life, customary law and tradition, administrative system of the people is quite different.

The Mikir Hills Tract was originally constituted by notification under the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation (11 of 1880) in the year 1884. In 1898 a part of this was transferred to Sibsagar while part of the Naga Hills district was transferred partly to Nowgong and partly to Sibsagar.¹⁰⁵ The amended boundaries of the Nowgong and Sibsagar Mikir Hills Tracts were notified in 1907. A slight modification was made in 1913-1914, when the area around Dimapur was retransferred to the Naga Hills. The Mikir Hills Sub-division was later constituted, except the Bhoi area of Jowai Subdivision of United Khasi and Jaintia Hills which was within the district of Sibsagar and Nowgong. Both records and remains testify that the people now inhabiting the geographical and administrative units of United Mikir and North Cachar Hill district had a long history of their own. The Neolithic and Megalithic finds and monuments support the view that the Karbis were the authors of some of these archeological finding in and around the present district.

3.2 Integrating Tribal people

Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru firmly believed in the '*unity in diversity*' in which people with different ethno-cultural identity have been living. He campaigned for the development of tribal areas in the fields of economic, social, political and intellectual. For the purposes, he laid down certain guidelines or instructions for the upliftment of tribal people which would later contribute for the framing of government policies towards the tribal areas.¹⁰⁶

1. The tribal should develop along the lines of their own genius. There should be no imposition or compulsion from outside and non-tribals should not approach them with superiority complex.
2. Their (tribal) rights in their land and forest should be respected and no outsider should be able to take possession of tribal lands. The incursion of the market economy into tribal areas had to be strictly controlled and regulated.
3. To encourage development of the tribal languages

¹⁰⁵ Assam Land Revenue Manual Vol.I Eighth Edition, pp CLXvi—CLXvii

¹⁰⁶ Ashish Bose and et.al, (eds.), *Tribal Demography and Development in North-East India*, New Delhi: B.R. Publications, 1990, pp. 164-165

4. In administration, reliance should be placed on the tribal people themselves and administrator should be recruited from among them. If an outsider is chosen or appointed to administer, they should have sympathetic approach or attitude towards them.
5. No excessive interference over administration in tribal areas. Efforts should be only to made administration and development through their own social and cultural institutions.

The attitude of Nehru towards the tribal and his approach were also agreed by Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India and other political leaders. Steering the middle course and development of the tribal people according to their genius is really a hard and delicate job. It demands imagination, sincerity and constant care. The policy of combination of the two is the gateway whereby the tribal people may enter into full union with India of which they form an important and valuable part. For a change to occur a change agent working with the oppressed must have a profound love for them; more importantly, he must firmly believe that the oppressed are capable of change, can learn and create a new identity for them.¹⁰⁷ So the question is how to develop the synthesis, how to bring the blessings and the advantage of modern medicine, agriculture and education to them. Nehru also suggested that in order to solve the problem of the tribal one has to go to them with genuine love and true simplicity.

3.3 Public Response to Statehood Demand and Militancy

The instrument used for the present study was the schedule for the public and unstructured interview for the militant leaders and social, political leaders of the territory. 180 copies of schedule were administered in Diphu, Bokajan and Hamren sub-divisions of Karbi Anglong district by using purposive sampling method. The schedule contained 27 item questions and where the researcher put to them the questions from the proforma. And their answer were listed and recorded in the space meant for the same in the proforma.

Table 3.3: Opinion of the respondents on Karbi Statehood

Sl.no	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Total
1	Yes	178	98.9%	178 (98.9%)
2	No	02	1.1%	02 (1.1%)
	Total	180	100%	180 (100%)

Source: Field Study

The Table 3.3 shows that out of 180 respondents, 178 respondents supported for Karbi Statehood. It reveals that 98.9% of the respondents are in favour of the movement.

¹⁰⁷ N.M. Agrawal 'HRD for Societal System: A Social Identity Based Approach' *The Indian Journal of Social Work* (Volume LV Number 2) April 1994, p. 191

The Table 3.4 shows the gender wise response of the respondents. Out of 180 sampled taken including both male and female, 140 of the male respondents are in support of the statehood movement which comprise of 77.8 percent. And 38 of the females also supported the movement which comprise of 21.1 percent. From the table it reveals that aggregate of 98.9 percent of both male and female respondents supported for the Karbi statehood.

Table 3.4: Gender wise response on the need of Karbi Statehood

Sl.no	Gender	Response with Percentage		Total
		Yes	No	
1	Male	140 (77.8%)	-	140 (77.8%)
2	Female	38 (21.1%)	02 (1.1%)	38 (22.2%)
	Total	178 (98.9%)	02 (1.1%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field Study

Out of the 180 samples taken for the purpose of the present study in three sub-divisions of Karbi Anglong, 92 of the respondents belong to Hindu community, 48 of the respondents belong to Christian and 38 of the respondents belong to other (Animism) community. And the Table 3.5 shows the communitywise response on Karbi Statehood.

Table 3.5: Community wise response on the need of Karbi Statehood

Sl. no	Community	Response with Percentage		Total
		Yes	No	
1	Hindu	92 (51.1)	2 (1.1%)	94 (52.2%)
2	Christian	48 (26.6)	-	48 (26.6%)
3	Other /Animism	38 (21.2%)	-	38 (21.2%)
	Total	178 (98.9%)	2 (1.1%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field Study

It is revealed that 51.1 percent of the Karbi Hindus community is of the opinion that they supported for Karbi Statehood. 26.6 percent of the respondents belong to Karbi Christian community and they supported wholly for Karbi Statehood. 21.2 percent of the respondents are belonging to Karbi Animism community they too wholly supported for Karbi Statehood. From the field data it is divulge that there is support from all the communities for statehood movement of the Karbis.

Table 3.6: Occupational wise response on the need of Karbi Statehood

Sl.no	Occupation	Response with Percentage		Total
		Yes	No	
1	Primary	110 (61.1%)	2 (1.1%)	112 (62.2%)
2	Secondary	55(30.6%)	-	55 (30.6%)
3	Tertiary	13(7.2%)	-	13(7.2%)
	Total	178 (98.9%)	2 (1.1%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field Study

The above Table 3.6 shows the occupational wise of the 180 sampled taken for the present study. The responses were taken to know which occupational groups of Karbi supported higher for the Karbi Statehood. And it revealed that 61.1 percent of the Karbi whose occupation falls under primary category supported the Karbi statehood. And 30.6 percent respondents with secondary occupational category and 7.2 percent respondents with tertiary occupationa category respectively the Karbi Statehood demand.

Table 3.7: Income wise response on the need of Karbi Statehood

Sl. No	Annual Income	Response with Percentage		Total
		Yes	No	
1	<15000	65 (36.1%)	2 (1.1%)	67 (37.2%)
2	15000-25000	33(18.3%)	-	33(18.3%)
3	25000-35000	47(26.2%)	-	47 (26.2%)
4	35000-45000	17(9.5%)	-	17(9.5%)
5	45000-55000	10 (5.5%)	-	10(5.5%)
6	55000>	6 (3.3%)	-	6 (3.3%)
	Total	178(98.9)	2 (1.1%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field Study

The above Table 3.7 illustrates the income wise response of the sample taken for the present study. It divulges that 36.1 percent of the respondents whose annual income is below 15000 supported for Karbi Statehood and considered as the highest tendency for statehood. And the second highest of supporter for the movement goes to whose income in between 25000-35000 it comprised of 26.2 percent of the total respondents. And above 55000 of annual income groups also supported for the cause and aggregate of 98 percent of the sampled taken supported for Karbi Statehood.

Table 3.8: Educational wise response on the need of Karbi Statehood

Sl.no	Educational Category	Response with Percentage		Total
		Yes	No	
1	Illiterate	5 (2.7%)	2 (1.1%)	7(3.8)
2	Literate	13 (7.3%)	-	13(7.3%)
3	Primary	27(15%)	-	27(15%)
4	High School	58(32.3%)	-	58(32.3%)
5	Intermediate	45(25%)	-	45(25%)
6	Graduation	18(10%)	-	18(10%)
7	Post Graduation	7(3.8%)	-	7(3.8%)
8	Other	5(2.8%)	-	5(2.8%)
	Total	178(98.9%)	2 (1.1%)	180(100%)

Source: Field Study

In the present survey it was revealed that irrespective of their background of educational qualification 98.9 percent of the respondents supported for Karbi statehood and the above Table 3.8 shows their responses.

From all the above tables of the respondents it can be understood that irrespective of their gender, religious belief, educational status, mode of livelihood and income sources 98.9 percent of the Karbis supported for Statehood movement. The demand for statehood and Karbi militancy are complimentary to each other. In order to know the origin of Karbi militancy in Karbi Anglong of Assam one must go back to the history of statehood movement in the territory. If one's study about statehood movement in Karbi Anglong and excluded the militant movement than the study will not depict the literal picture of the territory. Therefore, the present study tries to summarize the statehood movement in Karbi Anglong to have a rational understanding on the genesis of Karbi militancy.

3.4 Formation of All Party Hills Leader's Conference (1960)

On April 28, 1960 an emergency meeting was convened by Tribal Area Development Minister (Government of Assam), Captain Williamson Sangma for opposing the introduction of Assamese as official language of State with all the representatives of Autonomous District Council of Assam. It was led to the formation of All Party Hills Leaders' Conference (APHLC). Later the APHLC championed the demand of Hill State to the hill districts of Assam.¹⁰⁸ The Mikir Hills (now Karbi Anglong) District unit of APHLC was formed and Bareleng Terang was elected as President and Bapuram Singnar as the General Secretary.¹⁰⁹ On March, 1964 the APHLC Conference was held at Deithor under the initiative of Moniram Langneh and was attended by Standly Nichols Roy, Darwin Pugh and B.B. Lyngdoh, it was resolved to strengthen the Hill State demand by uniting all the hill tribes of North East India (then Assam).

In 1969 the Annual Session of the APHLC was held at Tura and from the report read out by the APHLC Secretary the delegates from Karbi Anglong were not satisfied on the Delhi Committee for keeping Mikir and North Cachar Hills District under the stage of 'option' (to join with Meghalaya or to remain with Assam). This very word gave a big blow to the heart of the Karbi delegates. After a discussion with the APHLC leaders, Captain Williamson Sangma gave hope to the delegates of Karbi Anglong for a visit to Diphu and convinces the Member of District Council (MDC) of the district for collecting 2/3(two-third) majority supporters as requisite criteria for removal of 'option'. Accordingly, Darwin Pugh and B.B. Lyngdoh came to Diphu and approached all the Karbi MDC to support in favour of Hills State Movement but they failed considerably. The Indian Parliament passed the bill for Autonomous State of Meghalaya on December 24, 1969 and the state was inaugurated on April 2, 1970 with cheer and rejoicing of the

¹⁰⁸ Kyndiah, P.R, *Meghalaya yesterday and today*: New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, 1991.

¹⁰⁹ Jyotiraj Pathak, (ed.), *Tribal Welfare in India: With special reference to North East India*, Vishakhapatnam: Global Publishing House India, 2014, p.75

people of Meghalaya.¹¹⁰ But demand of the hill tribes of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills were ignored.

3.5 Formation of Mikir Hills Progressive Party (1970)

The APHLC was dissolved eventually in Mikir Hills District and another party called the Mikir Hills Progressive Party (MHPP) was formed on January 1, 1970 with Barelong Terang as President and Bapuram Singnar as General Secretary. Besides there were other fraternity organisations like Mikir Hills Nationalist Liberation Organisation (MHNLO), Karbi Jirsong Anei (KJA), Citizens Association and Karbi Students' Association. These organisations were formed to take the social issues along with the demand for the separate state. Initially, the MHNLO was formed with the following persons like Birendranath Teron-Chairman, Indra Sing Ingti-Vice Chairman, Nihang Teron-General Secretary, Bidyadhar Borah-Joint Secretary, Sonaram Terang-Joint Secretary, Barelong Terang-Treasurer, Auditor and Adviser, Hari Kanta Ronghang-Treasurer, Auditor and Adviser. The MHPP leaders with their fraternity organisations also demanded the inclusion of Mikir Hills District to Nagaland and a memorandum was submitted to Sri. K.V.K Sundaram, Adviser, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India on November 21, 1971 at Dilaujan.

3.6 Formation of United Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills Leaders' Conference (1973)

The United Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills Leaders' Conference (UMHNCHLC) was formed on February 18, 1973 with the following leaders Sonaram Thousen, Longsodar Kathar, T. Nampuii and other 16 members. The first meeting of the conference was held on March 7, 1973 and May 5, 1973 at Diphu. The third meeting was held on June 1, 1973 at Haflong and in due course of the meeting they drafted a memorandum for separate state to the two hills district of Assam. The leaders then submitted a memorandum to Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, New Delhi on June 30, 1973 on the same demand.

3.7 Formation of All Party Peoples' Conference (1973)

The All Party Peoples' Conference (APPC) was formed on August 20, 1973 at Diphu Club. The meeting was convened by the ruling party of both Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hill district. The meeting was attended by Chief Executive Member, Executive Members and Members of both the District Council. The members elaborately

¹¹⁰ Chandrika Singh, *North-East India Politics and Insurgency*, New Delhi: Manas Publication, 2011, p.199.

discussed the political situation of both the hills district of Assam. They also reviewed the working of the administrative set up of the District Councils as contemplated under para 6 (2) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. The members recalled the continued political suppression and injustice from the then Government of Assam to all hill districts like Garo Hills, Naga Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Mizo Hills who later separated from Assam and became separate states. For the interest and emotional integrity of the state and assurance given by the Assam government for equal status, powers and developmental benefit as enjoyed by other hills districts separated from Assam, the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts opted to remain in Assam and agreed to accept the proposal of more powers under para 6 (2) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

But after several years of experiments and experiences it was found that this administrative arrangement indirectly tantamounts to provincialization of the district Council rather than solving the political aspiration of the people. The members strongly felt that separation from Assam would only solve the political aspiration of the two hills districts. And the meeting resolved to launch democratic and constitutional method for the demand of separate state comprising Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. The meeting nominated G.C Langthasa as President and Devinson Hanse as General Secretary with other 29 members with different portfolios.

3.8 Formation of Separate State Demand Committee (1980)

The Separate State Demand Committee (SSDC) was formed on July 15, 1980 under the initiative of Member of Legislative Assembly Mr. Barelong Terang. After a threadbare discussion and deliberation it was unanimously resolved to form the committee with Khor Sing Bey as President who was also the Chairman of Karbi Anglong District Council and Roy Enghee as General Secretary. The house resolved to persuade the Karbi Anglong District Council authority to adopt an official resolution on the separate state issue in the ensuing 121st Session which would be held on October 1, 1980. The frontal organisation, like the Karbi Students' Association also took active part and requested Mr. Bidya Sing Engleng, Chief Executive Member, Karbi Anglong District Council for taking up the official resolution on statehood issue. The signature campaign was jointly carried out by SSDC and KSA for strengthening the separate state issue. Out of twenty-six Member of District Council (MDC) in Karbi Anglong District Council including the opposition party, twenty four MDC gave their consent to support the Separate State issue of the Karbis except Chatra Sing Teron and Joy Sing Doloi. The Chairman of Karbi Anglong District Council sent the resolution to the Deputy Commissioner, Karbi Anglong district for approval. Accordingly, the Deputy

Commissioner sent the same to the Governor of Assam, but the approval did not come in time for which it was kept in abeyance as informed by the Chairman of the house.

3.9 Formation of Central Autonomous State Demand Committee (1986)

The Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) with mass support came to power in Assam with Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta as the Chief Minister. Then the Congress (I) led North Cachar Hills District Council was dissolved by the Assam Government in February, 1986. Consequently, after the dissolution of North Cachar Hills District Council, the Central Autonomous State Demand Committee (CASDC) was formed on March 5, 1986 at Halflong with Mr. Sonaram Thousen, Ex-Minister, Assam, Mr. G.C. Langthasa, MLA and Ex-Minister, Assam were nominated as Working President of the CASDC working committee. Mr. T. Nampui was nominated as General Secretary of the working committee, Mr. Birensing Ingti, MP. Mr. Rajen Timung, MLA, Mr. K.K. Hojai, Ex-Chief Executive Member of North Cachar Hill District Council, Mr. Mongal Sing Ingti, Chief Executive Member of Karbi Anglong District Council, Mr. G.C. Hojai, Chief Executive Member of North Cachar Hill District Council were nominated as members. The delegation team of Central Autonomous State Demand Committee went to Delhi and submitted a memorandum to Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India on April 9, 1986 on immediate implementation of Article 244 (A) of the Indian Constitution.¹¹¹

3.10 Formation of Autonomous State Demand Committee (1986)

The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) was formed on May 17, 1986 at Diphu Indoor Stadium under the headship of Dharam Sing Teron to demand an 'Autonomous State' under Article 244 (A) of the Indian Constitution. Since its formation, ASDC act as an anti-Congress party led mainly by youths and students who had participated in the Assam anti-foreigner agitation and felt sidelined by the caste-Hindu youths and student leaders from the valley. They impressed and persuaded upon the mass people of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills with the slogan "*No Autonomous State, No rest*", "*No Autonomous State, No election*". Initially, they even committed not to contest any election till the Autonomous State is achieved. But later the party registered as political party under section 29A of the Representation of People Act, 1951 and with effect from September 27, 1989 vide letter No. 56/R/180/89/9298 dated the 14th October, 1989 by Election Commission of India. And later in 1989 District Council election the party manifesto changed from 'No Autonomous State, No election' to 'No election, No Autonomous State'. They even exposed the Congress party for betraying the people of

¹¹¹ Article 244 (A) of the Indian Constitution recognises that some states can be created by enhancement of existing autonomous districts and councils. In this case, formation of the state of Meghalaya is the vivid model and has been retained exclusively for Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills district of Assam.

the two hill districts on Statehood issue from 1961 to 1986. The leaders convinced the people that to achieve the demand and aspiration of the people we need money and political power. Therefore, to participate in the electoral politics is due significant. Accordingly, in 1989 Council's election, the party placed their candidates to different constituencies and came out with overwhelming majority- out of twenty-six constituencies twenty-two seats were won by them.

The ASDC in tune with the aspiration of the people of Assam for restoration of democratic rights appreciated the Centre's decision to hold election in the State simultaneously with the rest of the country. They were equally convinced that 'free and fair' election was only wishful thinking when black laws like Assam Disturb Areas Act, Armed Forces (Special Power) Act and Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act are still in force in the state. The ASDC observed that deferment of the poll date to an extent when there was every possibility of voter's judgement being influenced by the result declared in the rest of the country, the Centre had appropriately fulfilled its commitment to the people of vested interests. Moreover, with the continuing presence of the army, para-military forces, known for its brutality even towards the peaceful and innocent citizens, the election scenario in the state was overcast with fear and suffocation where 'free and fair' election was bound to have bitter experience.

In such a situation the ASDC took the election as yet another phase of their continuing struggle for the achievement of democratic and human rights- a struggle for asserting the right to self-rule, the right to genuine autonomy, a struggle for ending all sorts of exploitation by the dominant group on the dependent group, the poor by the rich. When the different shades of political parties and groups were striving with each other to project themselves as potent contender for powers, the ASDC viewed the election only as a natural extension of their ongoing struggle to a wider and newer arena.

The demand for Autonomous State- which essentially represents the downtrodden Karbi people's legitimate aspiration for a political identity and socio-economic safeguard has struck the psyche of the common Karbis. From initial mass-euphoria to cohesive political movement took it all the hard work, firm political orientation and realistic approach in effecting a ground level mobilisation through continuous processes of political training. The ASDC promised that after assuming power in the Karbi Anglong District Council in 1989 with a bold declaration and defiant protests against the State government continuous and deliberate interference into the affairs of the District Council. Undeterred by the strong arms tactics and political black-mail by the State Government, the ASDC leaders were always at the forefront leading movement from both within and outside the District Council, interacting with the broad democratic mass movements to create a constant pressure on both the State and the Central Government. They adopted

'Meghalayan Way' to attain their Statehood demand. However, political manoeuvres resulted in periodic clashes of concern between the Congress and the progressively Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) led ASDC.

The Autonomous State Demand Committee stands for – (a) Immediate creation of Autonomous State under Article 244 (A) of the Indian Constitution, (b) Genuine autonomy at different level under federal structure, (c) Land to the tillers (d) Equal status to women, (e) Job opportunities for all, (e) An immediate halt to price-rise, and (f) the right of the workers.

3.11 Formation of Karbi Anglong Autonomous State Demand Committee (1986)

The Karbi Anglong Autonomous State Demand Committee (KAASDCOM) was formed on May 25, 1986 at Indoor Stadium, Diphu. The meeting was presided over by Hari Kanta Ronghang, who was the adviser of the committee. After a protracted deliberation, Rupon Sing Ronghang was nominated as President and Ajit Timung as General Secretary. The delegation team of the committee met the central government officials several times to discuss the matter. Under the initiative of KAASDCOM the first ever made discussion was on the Autonomous State issue. The delegation team members met several Member of Parliament of both National and regional parties and convinced them to raise the issue in the parliament. Accordingly, Mr. Sharad Dighe, Congress (I) M.P. from Maharastra had agreed to take up the matter and brought the issue in the parliament on July 30, 1980 vide question no. 1788 and the same was answered by Buta Singh, then the Union Home Minister, Government of India.

The delegation team also met Mr. P.A. Sangma, then the Union Minister of State for Labour and had detailed discussion about the issue. They clarified the question asked by Sangma that the people of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hill districts need an Autonomous State under the provision of the Article 244 (A) of the Indian Constitution. Further the leaders of the committee felt for re-organisation of the central body of the Autonomous State Demand Committee. The Central Autonomous State Demand Committee (CASDC) consisting of the ruling political party of both Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills convened a meeting on August 18, 1986 at the conference hall of Karbi Riso Adorbar (KRA) office, Diphu. The stress was given for the formation of a new committee by comprising the existing three committee viz. KAASDCOM, ASDC and CASDC in order to accommodate as many political parties and social organisations of the two hills district. But the leaders of the ASDC who attended the meeting hesitated to agree with the decision for dissolution.

The next meeting was held on August 30, 1986 at KRA's office, Diphu where Sonaram Thousen, President of CASDC presided over the meeting. In the meeting leaders of the ASDC were not present; however, it was unanimously resolved to dissolve the existing CASDC and a date was fixed for the joint meeting of both the leaders of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts on September 7, 1986 at Halflong.

3.12 Formation of Karbi Anglong North Cachar Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee (1986)

A meeting was convened in the District Council Guest House at Halflong on September 7, 1986 where leaders of both political and social organisations met together and discussed the importance of having unity among the people of two hill district for strengthening the movement for immediate implementation of Article 244 (A) of the Indian Constitution. Thus, in order to accommodate the all political parties and social organisations of both Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills it was resolved to form Karbi Anglong-North Cachar Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee (KANCHASDCOM) with Sonaram Thousen as President and Rupon Sing Ronghang as General Secretary. After the formation of the committee it was stressed upon the importance of having its branches all over the two hills district-Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills for easy mobilisation of the issue to the people.

Therefore important places like Vothung aji (Parokhowa), Den Arong, Dongmukak, Dhentaghat, Samelangso, Rongmongve, Angjokpani, Bagori, Kohora, Deihori, Deithor, Panjan, Chowkihol, Rongbonghat, Phuloni, Karkok, Center, Howraghat, Volongkom aji (Bakulia), Longnit, Pranprilangso, Singhason, Khonbamon, Longnit, Manja, Amlokhi, Dikrong, Dillai, Hidipi, Khatkhati, Bokajan, Hanjanglangso, Japralangso, Dilaujan, Doldoli, Dhansiri, Jengkha, Kheroni, Rongpangbong, Dongkamukam, Borthol, Vothatlangso, Khanduli, Umpanai, Borlangpher, Langsoli-et, Havaipur, Hamren, Phongbirik, Langlokso, Langbirik athoi of Karbi Anglong Umrangso and Halflong of North Cachar Hills district were located for mobilisation of the people to get support on the issue.

After the formation of the committee it took various programmes like Bandh, Rail Roko, and Black out, Economic blockade, and Dharna to intensify the movement as well as to pressurise the Central Government of the issue. The unswerving leadership compelled the Union Minister of State (Home Affairs) Mr. Chintamani Panigrahi to visit Diphu to gather first hand information on Autonomous State on August 1, 1987. Later, the KAASDCOM and KAANCHASDOM leaders were invited for first official talks on Autonomous State issue on December 26, 1988. The second round of talks on Autonomous State was held on July 25, 1989 in New Delhi by the delegation team. The

third round of official talks was held on April 23, 2001. They were asked to prepare a draft plan for Autonomous State in the two hills district of Assam. Accordingly, the team submitted draft plan and had exclusive discussion on Autonomous State on September 24, 2002. The delegation team of the committee had several discussions and meetings with the central government and submitted enough memorandums for consideration but till date the issue remains unfulfilled. However, with much keenness the leaders of the committee remains determined and fastened onto their demand.

3.13 Signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

After the General Election in 1991, the Congress party formed the government in Dispur under the leadership of Hiteswar Saikia, Chief Minister of Assam. And on July 7, 1992 a discussion was held between the representatives of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), Karbi Students' Association (KSA) and North Cachar Hills Students' Federation (NCHSF) and Government of Assam at Janata Bhawan, Dispur. The team was led by Member of Parliament Dr. Jayanta Rongpi and Member of Legislative Assembly Mr. Holiram Terang. In the discussion the Government of Assam gave a proposal for elevation of power to District Council and to drop the demand of Autonomous State. The representatives accepted the proposal made by the Assam Government which later led to the signing of Memeorandum of Understanding. The meeting was attended by Hills Areas Development Minister Mr. Gobin Chandra Langthasa, Transport Minister Mr. S.S. Ojha, Law Minister Mr. Devenanda Konwar, Public Work Department Minister, Mr. Golok Rajbongshi, and Fisheries Minister Mr. Silvious Kandapan, Minister for Food and Civil Supplies Dr. Ardhendu Dey, and Revenue Minister Mukut Sharma. Besides, Additional Chief Secretary Dr. J.K. Bagchi, Member State Planning Board Mr. Jatin Hazarika, Commissioner, Hills and Barak Valley Division Mr. P.K. Dutta, and Home Secretary Mr. T.L. Baruah were also present in the meeting.¹¹²

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on April 1, 1995 at New Delhi with the following representatives Chairman, ASDC Mr. Dhorom Sing Teron, President, Karbi Students' Association Mr. Robindra Rongpi, President, North CAchar Hills Students' Federation Mr. Prosanta Warisa, President, Dimasa Students' Union Mr. Joihan Longmailai, Spokesman, ASDC Mr. Holiram Terang, Spokesman, ASDC Dr. Jayanta Rongpi, and Chief Minister of Assam Mr. Hiteswar Saikia. The MoU document states that representative organizations of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts, which are governed under the aegis of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, have been feeling dissatisfied with the quantum of autonomy available under the said Schedule. Resultantly, there has been a demand for constituting an

¹¹² Mondol Sing Bey, *op.cit*, p. 149

Autonomous State within Assam under the Article 244 (A) of the Indian Constitution comprising two hills districts.

Following initiation of a dialogue by the Chief Minister of Assam Mr. Hiteswar Saikia in January 1992 with the leaders of the Hills tribal, a series of discussion have been held with Union Home Minister Mr. S.B. Chavan. The following understanding has been reached.¹¹³

- i. The Autonomous Council of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills district will be renamed henceforth as Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council.
- ii. The jurisdiction of two councils for the exercise of the executive powers will extend to the subject departments listed in Annexure-I. A resolution to this effect which will also be passed by the State will stand delegated to the above councils.
- iii. The State government will, before delegating the beginning of the financial year, give an indication to the councils of the overall financial allocations to them. The council will, therefore, prepare and pass their own budget and forward it to the State government for inclusion in the over-all State budget. Originally, on change will be made in the budget as proposed by the councils. However, if for any reason it becomes necessary to do so, the council would be consulted and would be explained behind the reason for the change.
- iv. Action will be urgently initiated for amendment of Para (1) of the Sixth Schedule for transferring Legislative powers to the councils in respect of the following subjects, in addition to powers already available to them under the Sixth Schedule.
 - a. Industries, subject to the provision of entries 7 and 52 of List I of the Seventh Schedule.
 - b. Communication, that is to say roads, bridges, ferries and other means of communication not specified in List I: Municipal tramways, ropeways, inland waterways and traffic thereon subject to the provision of List I and III with regard to such waterways: vehicles other than mechanically propelled vehicles.
 - c. Preservation, protection and improvement of stock and prevention of animal diseases: Veterinary training and practices and cattle pounds.
 - d. Primary and Secondary Education.
 - e. Agriculture, including Agricultural Education and Research, protection against pests and prevention of plant diseases.
 - f. Fisheries
 - g. Water, that is to say water supplies, irrigation and canals, drainage and embankment, Water storages and water power subject to the provision of entry 56 of List I.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 155

- h. Social security and social insurance, employment and deployment.
- i. Flood control schemes for protection of villages, paddy fields, markets, town, etc. (not of technical nature)
- j. Theatres and dramatic performances, cinemas subject to the provision of entry 50 List I: Sports, entertainment and amusement.
- k. Public Health and sanitation, hospital and dispensaries.
- l. Minor irrigation
- m. Trade and commerce and the production, supply and distribution of foodstuffs, cattle-fodder, raw cotton and raw jute and
- n. Libraries, Museum and other similar institutions controlled or financed by the State: ancient and historical monument and records other than those declared or under law made by Parliament to be national importance.

Additionally, the feasibility of inclusion of “Alienation of Land” in Clause (G) of sub-Para (1) of Para 3 of the Sixth Schedule will be examined. The laws relating to the List III of the Seventh Schedule of Constitution enacted by the Council shall be reserved for consideration and approval of the President.

- v. Action will be initiated for necessary amendment of the Sixth Schedule to provide for exercise of discretionary power by the Governor of Assam in respect to matters specifically indicated to the council in the manner provided for in paragraph 20-BE of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. However, the present formulation in paragraph 20-BB may be modified to provide that in addition to the Councils of Ministers, the Governor shall consult the District Council by omitting the word “ and if he thinks it necessary”. Additional provision viz. paragraph 2 (6), 2(6A) excluding the first provision there under, B (4) and 10 (3) may also be brought within the purview of Para 20-BB.
- vi. Para 14 (2) of the Sixth Schedule be modified by omitting the words “ with recommendation of the Governor with respect thereto”
- vii. The state Government would propose to the Central Government to examine the feasibility of bringing paragraph 4 (3), 4 (5), 12 (1b) and 17 of the Sixth Schedule within the purview of paragraph 20-BB.
- viii. While law and order will continue to be responsibility of the State Government it would however, evolve a mechanism for consultation with the CEM of the council concerned regarding the post of Senior Police and law and order officer i.e. the Superintendent of Police and below and the Deputy Commissioner and below in the area of the Autonomous Councils. Similarly, the State Government will also evolve a mechanism for associating the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Council concerned in the performance appraisal and recording of confidential report in respect of the above mentioned officers in accordance with the procedures being followed by the State Government.

- ix. In the finalization of the Annual Plan for the discussions with the Planning Commission, Officers of the Councils would be included in the State delegation.
- x. The feasibility of separately mentioning the fund meant for the areas of the Councils in the release made by the Union Government and modalities for the same will be examined urgently.
- xi. A suitable mechanism will be evolved to monitor the adequacy and promptitude in release to the Councils by the State Government of the funds meant for the Councils.

Thereafter, the ASDC pressurized the Government of Assam for the immediate implementation of the MoU and for the conferment of more powers to the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills District Council. Accordingly, Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Chief Minister of Assam attended a meeting on January, 12, 1997 and formally declared more powers to both the District Councils. He also assured the people that the other departments which were not transferred earlier would be done within April 1997.

The study shows that, MoU too has failed to fulfil the aspiration of the hills people of Assam as the core issue of 'Statehood' was sidelined and rejected. In the name of conferment more powers to the Council, the State Government interferes every bit of decision made by the Council. And the Council was left like a skeleton without a vein and flesh. All the existing power given under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India was diluted by the State Government. The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council in their 184th Session on November 22, 2002 has passed a resolution for immediate implementation of Article 244 (A) to the Indian Constitution.

"The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council feels that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the Government of Assam and the movement leaders of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Autonomous District on first April, 1995 in New Delhi in presence of the Hon'ble Union Home Minister granting greater autonomy to Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council and the provision of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1995 (42 of 1995) are no longer sufficient to protect the identity, culture, tradition, language and fulfil the social, economic and political aspiration of the people of Karbi Anglong District. Hence, the House is of consensus opinion that the MoU and the provision of the Sixth Schedule alone without enforcing the provision of Article 244 (A) of the Constitution of India are no longer sufficient to protect the overall interest of the people of Karbi Anglong District of Assam".¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ See, Resolution taken during the 184th Session of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Diphu passed by George Millik, Chairman, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) on November 22, 2002.

The assurances made by the state government to protect the indigenous tribal of the hill districts became a matter of total failure and fidelity. The legitimate demands of indigenous tribals were neglected and their rights are deprived in all spheres. The study also shows that there was a complete failure and futility on the part of the government to understand the justifiable demands made by the Karbi people and leading to adopt militant tactics by section of aggressive youth in the territory.

3.14 Other Factors Responsible for Karbi Militancy

Identity consciousness and mobilization are often positive features of plural societies but may become counterproductive when they are employed for discriminatory practices and unjustified use of violence. The perception of denial of rights and domination by others creates the basis for such ethnic movement.

In the present study it was found that other factors also contributed for the growth of Karbi militancy in Karbi Anglong. The movement leaders believed that the Karbis were deprived suppressed and subjugated in every angle. And some of the significant factors are discussed below:

3.14.1 Language Suppression

‘A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbol by which members of social group co-operate and interact’. Language is not only a tool of communication but also has ethnic socio-cultural and political implication. In a society which has various ethnic groups, the use of language is often imposed or one language ‘dominates’ the other depending on the importance and numbers of speakers. The dominant language of the larger community occupies a pre-eminent place subduing the minor language. There are many instances, where the minority language becomes a ‘dead’ language.¹¹⁵ The north-eastern region displays very striking socio-cultural features in term of ethnicity, linguistic and cultural practices. Each ethnic group has its own distinctive socio-cultural identity. According to the Linguistic Survey of India, the language spoken by the Karbis belongs to the great family of Indo-Chinese speech called the Tibeto-Burman.¹¹⁶

When the American Baptist Missionaries came to Assam in 1836, they undertook certain initiatives for the preservation of the endangered tribal languages. They reached the Brahmaputra Valley with their printing press from Burma (now Myanmar) at the behest of the Calcutta Baptists to the American Mission in Myanmar, with a view to spreading the gospel among the people of Burma-China frontier and Assam. They

¹¹⁵ U.A. Shimray, ‘Linguistic Matrix in Manipur,’ *Economic and Political Weekly* (Vol. XXXV No.34) August 19-25, 2000, p. 3007

¹¹⁶ G.A. Grierson (ed.), *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. no. II (part-II) Calcutta, 1902, p. 88

selected Sadiya as the mission station, as it was a strategic location from where the whole of Assam could be reached without much difficulty.¹¹⁷ During their stay in Assam the Missionaries did a commendable job for the upliftment of Karbi language. The Karbis have no written character of its own and the first publication printed was, a short catechism issued by a missionary press in Sibsagar in 1875.¹¹⁸ Some of the publications in Karbi language by the American Baptist Missionaries are - '*Dhorom Arnam Aphrang Ekethan*,¹¹⁹ *Arleng Alam*,¹²⁰ *Pli-pli akitap*,¹²¹ *Areng Alam Angbong Akitap*,¹²² *Arleng Kalakha Akitap*,¹²³ *Birta Keme*.¹²⁴ The missionaries published the first Karbi monthly journal called '*Birta*'¹²⁵ in Roman script edited by Rev. William Ralph Hutton in 1935.

After the formation of the Karbi Anglong district, a few conscious citizens began to write and publish in their own language. Various organizations for the social and economic upliftment of the Karbis also began to publish their newsletters in Karbi. The Catholic Missionaries also published a monthly magazine called '*Samphri Atur*' besides, the publication of Holy Bible in Karbi. The Karbi Anglong Presbyterian Missions also published a book title, '*Karbi Self-Taught*' for new learner who want to learn the language. Few Karbi Journals and magazines have been in occasional publication like- Ove Kimi, Karbi, Klirdap, Tovar Kimi, Nokbe, Monjir, Lamde, Loti, Atur Kimi, Longsar, Lokimo, Wojaru, and so on. Writers who have been contributing regularly to the development of Karbi literature through their various compositions includes Lunse Timung, Bidorsing Kro, Sabrasi Timung, Longbiram Ingti Kathar, Bidorsing Rongpi, Suren Kramsa, Bidyasing Rongpi, Khoyasing Hanse, Bapuram Teron, Ananda Rongphar, Jit Kumar Rongpi, Pari Rangpi, Gandhi Tokbi, Sarklim Taro, Longkamar Timung, Deben Timung, Rongbong Terang, Arun Teron, Jorsing Bey, Mondal Sing Bey, Sar-et Hanse, Sing Kro, Longkam Teron, Samsing Teron, Khirla Teronpi, Ruplan Ingtipi, Sadhana Rongpipi, Rina Patorpi, Ruhini Teronpi, among others.¹²⁶

¹¹⁷ Hillary Terang, 'The Early Baptist Mission in Karbi Anglong', *Daybreak in the Hills*, Tika, March 21-22, 2009, p. 8 {A Souvenir of the sesquicentennial celebration of the Gospel in Karbi Anglong (1858-2009)}

¹¹⁸ Charles Lyall, *op.cit* pp.73-74

¹¹⁹ *Dhorom Arnam aphrang Ekethan*, (the first Catechism in Karbi language published in Devnagiri script. It was initiated by Sar Rongbong and published at Sibsagar, assisted by American Baptist Mission, 1875).

¹²⁰ *Arleng Alam*, (a Karbi Primer, artifact of the hardwork of an American Missionary E. Persell in 1891)

¹²¹ *Pli-pli akitap* (another Karbi Primer by Anon. and published from Tika- an American Baptist Missions Centre in Karbi Anglong, the Primer was published in 1893)

¹²² *Arleng Alam Angbong Akitap* (a Karbi Reader was written by J.M. Carvell and Thengkur Pandit published by Assam Secretariate Press, Shillong, 1904)

¹²³ *Arleng Kalakha Akitap*, (a Karbi Primary Arithmetic by P.E. Moore and Rev. J.M. Carvell published by Assam Secretariate House, Shillong, 1904)

¹²⁴ *Birta Keme* (Glad Tiding in Karbi by Mosendra Pandit and American Missionaries to the Karbis published from Tika by American Baptist Missionary Union, 1904).

¹²⁵ '*Birta*' in Karbi means '*News*', Seventy seven years ago when the hill tribes inhabiting the North East India or the then Assam were preoccupied with just how to live, what to eat and what to do? The Karbis have a monthly journal called '*Birta*' edited by William Ralph Hutton in 1935.

¹²⁶ <http://www.karbiyouthfest.wordpress.com/>

The present study finds that inspite of its richness the Karbis began to forget their language abruptly since the past few decades. In day-to-day conversation with family members, friends and others, the Karbis use many Assamese words without which conversation becomes incomplete. Majority of its speakers are bilingual in Assamese, and amongst the younger generation the ancestral language is being abandoned at an alarming rate in favour of Assamese.¹²⁷ Only few Karbi can speak ingenious Karbi language in the present era. As for example 'Nagamese' which is a Creole language is a mixture of various Naga languages and Assamese for conversation sake and which is spoken in Nagaland. The language is not anyone's mother tongue. Karbis have got their own mother tongue but their boys and girls began to speak 'Creole Karbi'¹²⁸ at their early age and using it as means of conversation and in the process steadily they began to forget their own language. The study also finds that the Karbis are vulnerable to their language. Karbi people living in the border areas of Meghalaya are influenced by Khasi and Jaintia languages and those living in the border areas of Nagaon, Morigaon and Golaghat are influenced by Assamese. And the Karbis living in the plain are losing their language rapidly. Social and economic pressure drives isolated communities to assimilate and adopt the popular languages of the region. Any language becomes endangered if it is spoken by a minority and is held in low esteem, forcing its speakers to avoid usage or to pass it on to their children.

The village 'Mikir Bheta' of Nagaon district in Assam depicted the best example in this context as the area was once dominated by the Karbis (then Mikirs) but due to language adaptation the Karbi living in Mikir Bheta began to forget their own language and absorbed to larger Assamese language. Other Karbi villages which adapted Assamese language and cultures include- Kothiatoli, Bamuni, Morung (present Morongi), Salona, Dikaru, Disa, Kukura kata, Harlok Parbat, Amla Parbat, Thero Parbat, Kanti Parbat, Singimari, Jungthung and Bagori. In such a situation the Karbis were afraid to lose their language at the altar of the main stream in the long run¹²⁹. During the declaration of Karbi Anglong District Council on June 23, 1952 there was already 152,537 (as per 1951 census) population speaking Karbi language. But even today the language is not included in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution of India in spite of continuous petitions and prayers made by some social and literary organizations of the district.

In 1960, the Assam Legislative Assembly had passed an Act and makes Assamese as the official language of the state. The government's decision to introduce the bill in the

¹²⁷ Pauthang Haokip, *Socio-Linguistic situation in North-East India*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2011 p.13

¹²⁸ *Creole Karbi* is simplified version of Karbi language mixing Karbi and Assamese for easy conversation.

¹²⁹ *Richohidi* (Lo-Kimo), a souvenir of the 16th Annual conference of Karbi Lammet Anei (Karbi Sahitya Sabha) held at Rongteplong aklam, Richohidi, Karbi Anglong, on January 28-31, 2004. p.62

Legislative Assembly had erupted violent protests in various parts of the state. There were allegations and counter allegations among communities which made the situation tense. The Act provides “Assamese shall be used for all or any official purposes of the state of Assam. Further the Act provided that the English language, so long as the use thereof is permissible and thereafter Hindi in place of English, shall be used for such official purposes of the Secretariat and the offices of the head of the departments of the state government.”¹³⁰ The Act further declared that there would be no imposition of Assamese on the non-Assamese speaking population. To allow communication between the state capital and the hill districts (Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills) the English language will be used unless the regional and district council decide otherwise. The language issue in Assam remains dormant in normal times, but in the slightest provocation the issue goes out of proportion and deteriorates the situation to the lowest point. Another such deteriorating environment could be seen when the question of the medium of instruction had surfaced in Assam. In 1972, the Gauhati University had decided to introduce the Assamese as the medium of instruction in the colleges under its jurisdiction. This had erupted heavy uproar among the people of the Brahmaputra Valley who opposed this idea.

In 2007 the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Executive Committee held meeting on May 19, 2007 and passed a resolution (Resolution number 17) to establish Karbi Medium School of elementary education to provide for the development of Primary and Higher Education in Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council area and isolated Karbi populated areas in various parts of Assam.¹³¹ Accordingly, the KAAC has established twenty-nine (29) numbers of Karbi Medium Schools in the district at their expenses but till today there is no notification of approving the medium from the Government of Assam. Till date no mechanism from the Government of Assam has come up to improve and preserve the Karbi language which was once initiated by the American Baptist Missionaries in Assam. Language may be revitalizing through community participation, education and giving economic and social benefits. According to BB Bhattacharya,¹³² ‘Language faces a threat because many people living in remote and tribal areas do not get education in their mother tongue.’ The tribals of Assam like Bodos, Karbis, Dimasas, etc. are being compelled to study Assamese in Schools and Colleges.¹³³ No doubt the dominant language in any state or region eventually develops to the status of ‘lingua-franca’ of the state. And it is true for the state of Assam where Assamese is commonly used to communicate between the various ethnic groups. But most tribals in the state neither read nor write Assamese.

¹³⁰ See, *The Assam Official Language Act*, 1960.

¹³¹ See, Proposed Act to provide for Karbi Medium School (Elementary Education) under Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council in the state of Assam, 2007, p.3

¹³² B.B. Bhattacharya, Vice-Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

¹³³ U.A Shimray, *op.cit.*, p. 3008

The given Table 3.9 depicts the over all literacy rate of Karbi Anglong starting from 1971 to 2011. From the Table it shows us that in 1971 there was only 19.17% literacy including all the tribes and communities living in the district. And in 1981 it has increased upto 45.57%, according to the statistical report. The literacy rate of the district increased to 58.83% in 2001 and 69.25% in 2011. But the the literacy percentage of the Karbi tribe is unreasonable.

Table 3.9: Literacy rate of Karbi Anglong district (1971-2011)

Year	Male Literacy (In percentage)	Female Literacy (In percentage)	Total Percentage
1971	26.93%	10.29%	19.17%
1991	55.55%	34.34%	45.57%
2001	68.11%	48.65%	58.83%
2011	76.14%	62.00%	69.25%

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Guwahati.

The failure of the educational aspiration of the linguistic minorities can be ascribed to the existing language policy and the kind of language planning processes the state government undertakes. This is evident from the language problem which has erupted from time to time. The problem was temporarily solved by keeping Assamese as an option for tribal in lieu of additional English or other Modern Indian Languages (MIL) recognized by the State. Out of the 23 or more tribal languages spoken in the state only few languages viz., Bodo, Mizo, Hmar, Khasi are taught in the schools while majority of the tribal languages were still need a revival. Looking at the sluggish development in education, Moffat Mills had commented “an English youth is not taught Latin until he is well grounded in English.”¹³⁴ From his statement it is clear that, one should not teach other language unless grounded in mother tongue.

With the authority doing very little for the protection and promotion of these minority languages, they are virtually reduced to a state where they have to depend everything- ranging from education to mass media in the language of the dominant language (Assamese) or languages of wider communication –Hindi and English. It was on June 6, 2004 the first daily newspaper in Karbi ‘*The Arleng Daily*’ (see Table 3.1) was published under the ownership of T.P. Hanse. Since then few Karbi newspaper are coming up in the district but it is not possible to protect the Karbi language without government intervention. Planned mechanism may be established by the authority concerned for the linguistic minority in the state. Publishing few articles in the media is not possible for a dying language like Karbi to be revitalized. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Atlas of the

¹³⁴ Moffat Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, Guwahati: Publication Board, 1984, Appendix I, para, 29.

World's Language in Danger 2009, the Karbi language was listed as endangered language of North East India.¹³⁵ Further it was added that endangered language category includes languages that face the threat of becoming extinct because of a fall in the number of people speaking them. According to Lawrence D. Kaplan,¹³⁶ 'A living language has speakers who use it for communication'. From Kaplan's point of view it is clear that there has to be speakers for any language to consider as living. Certain languages face the threat of extinction as they are not used as medium of instruction in educational institutions, government transactions and the media said Omkar N. Koul.¹³⁷ He further stated that, 'if a language is not getting sufficient role in these three domains, there is every possibility that it will die. The fate of a number of languages in India is the same as they are neither used for education nor for governance purpose'.

The Karbi media of the territory have been trying their level best to protect and preserve the endangered Karbi language since the past one decade. The first weekly registered paper in Karbi language was Longchor and The Arleng Daily became the first daily newspaper in Karbi language in the territory for the upliftment of the people and its language. At present the Karbis have four registered daily newspapers as shown in Table 3.10 but cannot improve much without government policy and mechanism to preserve the language.

Tabel 3.10: Registered Newspapers in Karbi language as on December 2012

Sl. No	Title of the Newspaper	Periodicity	Place of publication
1	Longchor	Weekly	Diphu
2	The Arleng Daily	Daily	Diphu
3	Thekar	Daily	Diphu
4	Karbi Anglong Arnivang	Daily	Diphu
5	Birta Arnivang	Daily	Diphu

Source: District Information and Public Relation Office (Hills), Diphu

The first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal was fervent advocate of minority and tribal languages. Nehru felt that the constitutional safeguard for minority languages were not enough and the government should not only encourage the tribal and minority languages but these also "must be given all possible support and the condition in which they can flourish must be safeguarded. In the matter of languages there must be no compulsion whatever". Article 29 and 30 of Indian Constitution provide the right to minority to conserve their language and script and establish and administer educational institution of their choice. Besides, Article 350 gives the minorities the right to submit a representation for redresses of any grievances in their own language.

¹³⁵ See, UNESCO Atlas of the World's Language in Danger 2009

¹³⁶ Lawrence D. Kaplan, Director of the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska

¹³⁷ Prof. Omkar N. Koul, former Director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore

Owing to policy of indigenization of language and homogenization of culture, linguistic minority in every state are facing ever increasing difficulties in education, employment and other affairs of day-to-day life. Further with the effort to replace English by regional languages the disadvantages of the minorities will further aggravate unless their interest are protected by statutory law of the government.¹³⁸

The Karbis have linguistically suppressed by the dominant linguistic group for more than half a century. In spite of statutory guarantees provided by the Indian Constitution, the linguistic minorities continue to lag behind development pursuit of the nation. There is something lacking in the way the existing language policy and the kind of language planning process that the government has adopted. This has alienated the linguistic minorities especially the non-scheduled language. The present study has found that the state has failed in protecting and promoting the linguistic minority groups and ethnic tension has aggravated in the state. Language, a means of communication becomes a barrier when it is used to suppress a people. And they vigorously demand for Karbi statehood so that the tribe can independently undertakes any decision for preserving and promoting their language.

3.14.2 Cultural and Religious Assimilation

Culture refers to the collective deposit of knowledge, belief, values and ethic acquired by a group of people in the course of generation through individual and group striving. The arts and other manifestation of human intellectual achievement are regarded as culture collectively.¹³⁹ The Karbi considered themselves as having rich culture and heritage. But as time goes by the culture of the Karbis resembles the other dominant group in the state. The gradual change of culture depending on the circumstances and assimilation to larger Indian culture has worried section of the Karbis leaders. Due to various factors and issues the Karbi culture is on the verge of extinction.

Chomkan is a ceremony performed by the Karbi tribe for the departed soul. 'Chom' means 'hades' and 'kan' mean 'dance' so literally it is a 'Dance of Hades' According to the Karbi tradition, there was a person named *Thireng-Vangreng* who can communicate between the present world and the hades. He was born for the sake of the dead people. He formulated some funeral rules called '*Chomkan*' which could be performed by the Karbis after the death of family members for the soul to reach heavenly abode. And still today *Chomkan* is celebrated for propelling the death's spirit for heavenly abode.

¹³⁸ Pauthang Haokip, *op.cit*, p. 80

¹³⁹ Definitions of culture in English (retrieved on 13/08/2013 from www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/culture)

Chomkan ceremony is also called *Lasakan* (Dance of Lhasa), *Sokpam-Parlin* or *Phelang Ame Ke-u*. *Chomkan* are of different types (i) *Kan pla-pla*, (ii) *Langtuk* and (iii) *Harne*.

Kan pla-pla is a *Chomkan* performed by the economically poor section in the society. With least expenditure and minimum budget the family can celebrate the festival. The poor and down trodden in the society too have their spirit; so in order to take the death spirit to the heavenly abode this type of *Chomkan* is performed.

Langtuk Chomkan is mainly for the middle class in the society who are economically self-reliant and can afford to celebrate the *Chomkan* in an exceptional way. The Karbis also believe that if the *Langtuk Chomkan* is performed the death spirits need not worry about food, clothes and shelter.

Harne Chomkan is for the wealthy class in the society. It was also believed that if the *Harne Chomkan* is performed by the family members, the death spirit will have the best place in the heavenly abode. The spirit will never be in sorrows and in tears ever.

The Karbis are not idol worshippers but they are not agnostic. They strongly believe the presence and immortality of the spirit. So to appease the spirit and propel to the heavenly abode *Chomkan* is performed.

'*Chong-kedam*' is a dance performed during the '*Chomkan*' using shields and swords. The dance is usually performed by the male dancers with the beating sound of drum. There are two types of *Chong-kedam* like *Chongso-kedam* and *Chongpi-kedam*. It is a dance in remembrance of the great valiant or those martyred for a noble cause and gave a clarion call to the youth to be brave, strong and determined and to protect the society like their forerunner. No song is sung in this type of dance other than the drums of the *Duhuidi* (expert drummers).

'*Nimso Kerung*' is a dance performed by the Karbi boys and girls during *Chomkan*. The dance is accompanied by a song gratifying to '*Jili*' or '*Larta*'. *Jili* or *Larta* is the first Karbi lady dancer which encouraged the Karbi women to help their male counterpart in every walk of life. So whenever '*Nimso Kerung*' is performed the boys will hold the hand of the other boys adjacent to him and the girls will also do the same and will budge round and round as a sign of unity and love. The song is accompanied by Drums, *Muritungpo* (flute made of buffalo's horn) and *Murijangkek* (flute made of bamboo). The girls have their heads covered with *Piba* (cloth for carrying baby).

Banjar Keku is performed during *Chomkan* ceremony by the male dancers. It is a dance which gave the art of constructing a house from beginning till the end. This training has to be imparted to the young generation for the days to come. Apart from being the head of a family, every individual in the Karbi society must have the knowledge of constructing a house and protection of family members from natural calamities. In this dance, no song and music will be accompanied. Instead the male

dancers in gay voices will dance around the bamboo pole with thin bamboo pieces allied into it.

Rongker is to perform at the beginning of the New Year by appeasing the different deities for the well being of the entire village and to reap a good harvest. It is an obligatory village religious festival. *Rongker* is not to worship individually but by the village as a whole. *Rongker* are of different types (a) *Havar Rongker*, (b) *Pirda Rongker*, (c) *Vophong Rongker* (d) *Dengja Rongker* (e) *Mavur Rongker* (f) *Tongprop Tongso Rongker*.¹⁴⁰

'*Havar Rongker*' is performed by the people who are living in the hilly areas with a view to have peace in the village and reap a good harvest in their Jhum cultivation. The *Havar Rongker* is also known as *Than Rongker*. '*Havar*' literally mean 'Jhuming area' where paddy and other crops are cultivated. It is a supplication for seeking blessing for the whole year.

'*Pirda Rongker*' is widely known as '*Rongkerpi*' (great *Rongker*) for the whole *Mauza* for peace and tranquility. Each villages headed by the village headmen brings their contribution to the great *Rongker*. It is a combination of *Hemphu*, *Mukrang*, *Ransinja* and other indigenous gods where the village is situated.

'*Vophong Rongker*' is also known as '*Longri Rongker*' This *Rongker* is performed only once in a year. It is performed for the well being of the people in a *Longri*. Every individual in the *Mauza* is responsible for the successful *Rongker* ritual and will contribute monetarily and physically for the ceremony.

'*Dengja Rongker*' can be performed only by the '*Dengja*' of Teron clan. It is also known as '*Dovanso Rongker*'. Generally, this *Rongker* is performed to get protection from the tigers. This kind of worship needs human sacrifice. The *Dovanso Rongker* is to be performed once in every five years. The victim come voluntarily and approaches the village where the *Dengja Rongker* wouldl be performed.

'*Mavur Rongker*' is generally performed during the night and is also known as '*Ajo Rongker*'. This type of *Rongker* is performed as precautionary measures from any type of plague which can harm the villagers. *Mavur Rongker* is carried out by the participation and contribution of all resident in a village.

'*Tongprop Tongso Rongker*' has no fixed date and time. '*Tongprop Tongso*' denotes 'prompt and immediate'. This *Rongker* is to be performed immediately as preventive measure of impending natural calamities, ethnic clashes in the *Longri*.

Goats and fowls are sacrificed to '*Arnam Pharo*' (hundred gods) and so do the local gods of hills and rivers. A small village will sacrifice two or three goats, a large village will sacrifice ten or twelve depending upon the number of villagers. The meat will be eaten with rice and rice-beer but only the men can share the meat. On that night, the men must sleep at hongpharla (space infront of the house) apart from their wives. The

¹⁴⁰ Mondol Sing Bey, *The Karbi Belief*, Diphu: Karbi Lammet Amei, 2009, p. 34

gods are invoked in the following phrase: “We live in your territory; save us and help us! Send no tigers or sickness, prosper our crops and keep us in good health, and year by year we will sacrifice like this. We depend wholly upon you!” There is no music and dancing at the Rongker.¹⁴¹

The ‘*Jambili Athon*’ is the cultural symbol of the Karbis. It is also the national asset and social emblem of the Karbi society. The *Jambili Athon* is the artifact made from the wood of Bengvoi (*Holarrhina antidysenterica*). The artifact consists of a main stem and four branches. On the main stem, there is *Vojaru* (Racket tailed Drongo), *Votevang* (Drongo) birds takes position in other four branches and on the sides are perched the woodpecker birds.¹⁴² Every bird that perched in the *Jambili Athon* has a meaning. It depicts the picture of traditional Karbi administration. The *Vojaru* stand for the Karbi King and other birds symbolize the *Pinpo* and *Habe*- representatives from the traditional administrative segment of the Karbi Kingdom. Number of branches depends upon the status of Longri. There are four Lindoks in Ronghang Kingdom so the *Jambili Athon* in Ronghang Rongbong has four branches. In Chinthong Kingdom there are three Lindoks and thus the *Jambili Athon* has three branches. In Amri Kingdom there has only two Lindoks, so the *Jambili Athon* has only two branches. In the Hot-Havar area like (i) Nilip Hot Havar, (ii) Socheng Dhenta Hot Havar, (iii) Nihang Hot Havar and (iv) Lumbajong Hot Havar they have neither Lindok nor *Habe* so they adopted the administrative system of Ronghang Kingdom. So the *Jambili Athon* used in these areas is like that of Ronghang Kingdom having four branches.

The *Vojaru* (racket tailed drongo) is the most coveted bird among the Karbis. The racket tailed of this bird is used for decorating the hair knot of the Karbi youth. The youngster feels proud to dance in the Chomkan wearing the racket tailed. The youngster who wears a tail of the bird is often honoured as the leaders in the society. The racket tailed drongo has some notable features. This bird is seen to be followed by many other types of birds in the habitat. In the world of birds it is an exception as this bird moves around in the jungle, flocks of different birds including the woodpecker will follow it. Leadership is one of the remarkable quality of this bird. Taking into consideration of this leadership quality the racket tailed drongo has been placed on top of the *Jambili Athon* as the symbol of Karbi King. The other birds have the quality, of chasing the harmful bird so they were perched in the *Jambili Athon* to stand and protect the Karbi King such as Lindok, *Pinpo*, *Habe* and *Pherangke*. The woodpecker which was hangs on the stem of *Jambili Athon* carries a cavernous meaning. This bird can hang to the tree in any condition and collect insects and pests. It was believed that this bird in *Jambili Athon* represents the *Pherangke* (messenger or ambassador). He will carry every order of the King however difficult it may be. Because of this distinctive quality the woodpecker is carved on the *Jambili Athon*. The *Jambili Athon* is ethnically decorated with beads and

¹⁴¹ Charles Lyall, *op.cit*, p.42

¹⁴² Mondol Sing Bey, *op.cit*, p.49

sobai (couries). The Thireng-Vangreng, a legendary brought the utility of Jambili Athon to the Karbi society during the 'Chomkan' ceremony. If Chomkan is regarded as the life of the Karbi culture, Jambili Athon is its soul.¹⁴³

The Bachelors' Dormitory is the most important organization of the Karbis. The Basapo, an officer of the Habeship is in charge of the bachelors' dormitory which is also known as 'Terank Ahem', 'Terank Hongbar' but popularly known as 'Jirkedam'.

The word 'Jirkedam' usually means 'collective march' or 'collective work'. It was originally designed to include males only but now the females are also accommodated although, they do not occupy any official rank of consequences. In fact, participation in it means the preparation of the youth for the future. The dormitory is a training ground for the youth. It is not merely a club but it is a school too. The youngmen in unity learn the various skills- cultivation, weaving, the titbits of the family life and the village defence. The continuous assembly of the local youth, in one place generates a fellow feeling which persists.¹⁴⁴

The girls do the cooking and other works and help the boys in all matters. They seem to be more painstaking than the boys. They are not allowed to stay in the night and the sex-discipline is an exemplary evidence of the success of the system. The young men belonging to different clan mix freely and purposefully. A number of boys and girls assemble and work is distributed among them. They are then grouped into some sections and each section works under a leader. The office bearer includes- Kleng Sarpo (leader), Klengdun (deputy leader), Sodar Kethe (assistant leader), Sodar So (deputy assistant leader), Barlon Kethe (treasurer), Barlon So (deputy treasurer), Sangho Kerai Kethe (group leader), Sangho Kerai So (deputy group leader), Chengburup Kethe (drummer), Chengburup So (deputy drummer), Motan Ar-e (work finder), Motan Ar-vi (deputy work finder), Langbong Kethe (water supplier), Langbong So (deputy water supplier), Chin Hak Kethe (equipments keeper), Chin Hak So (deputy equipments keeper), Me Apei (fire keeper), Lang Apei (water keeper), Arphek Po (cleaner or sweeper) Phankri (helper) and Hajar Aso (ordinary member without specific duty). At the end of the day, the party returns to the Terank Ahem and take rest for the night. Laughing and joking is allowed among themselves. The members go home for meals and return. If somebody is still out, the party goes out to find him out. In the winter season, fire is lighted and all members sat around the fire for gossiping.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Rongbong Terang, *A Glimpse of Karbi Literature and Culture*, Diphu; Diphu Sahitya Sabha, 2010, p. 60

¹⁴⁴ Gopala Chandra Medhi, *Jirkedam: A School in Deeds*, Guwahati: Jyoti Khataniar, 2004, pp. 27f

¹⁴⁵ Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *Sociology of the Karbis*, New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1986, pp. 61f

At present, the Jirkedam has lost its position because of the spread of enlightenment. It is the urban areas from where the institution has completely disappeared. It survives only in the remote villages in the territory.

'*Duk*' is a black line tattooed by the Karbi women in the middle of their face from forehead-nose-lips-chin. It was regarded as the sign of beauty. Women are always seen to take the initiative in matter of aesthetics. Both Karbi male and female coloured their teeth in black called *So-ik*.

The Karbis performed post-harvesting festival called *Hacha Kekan*. This is rather a merry-making festival where community feast, singing and dancing has arranged. An offering is made to the goddess in the form of sacrifice of a fowl. The *Sarthe* is invited to grace the occasion and he is honoured with rice beer and *banta*. The reaping and collection of ripened paddy from the field is the substantial portion of work. The sheaves of paddy are kept at a cleared space. The whole lot is brought home on a latter date. An array of harvesting songs is sung in praise of the goddess. This is called 'Soksi-Sokpam'. The party takes part in rice-husking and also in the storing of the thrashed grains.¹⁴⁶

A prolonged feasting occurs in the house of the person for whom the party works on the final day; the *Sarthe* presides over the parting function and he is offered a bottle of rice beer. The song starts with an accompanying dance which lasts for the whole night. The refrain of the song is history of agriculture in gist. On day-break, the mirth and merry-making end and the party disperses.

Besides, the Karbi also observes some rituals and ceremony like- Chojun-Choku, Adam-Asar, etc. The Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) has been pioneering in sowing the seed of cultural awareness since its inception in 1977 but they could not do much for the upliftment of the Karbi culture. Section of the Karbi youths has now begun to forget their rich culture and tradition. Many of the Karbis' family have assimilated the larger Assamese culture. They prefer dominant cultures rather than their own traditional culture of festivities. The old ethics had lost sanction and a vacuum has been created in the minds of the Karbis and the upcoming generation cannot resist the religions and cultures which are soaring around.

It is a known fact that the Karbi tribe is originally hills dweller. They settled in the hills for jhum cultivation and to maintain their livelihood. The tribe had been living in the dense forest, inhospitable and inaccessible hilly terrain. As they grew up in such nature they were indoctrinated to *Animism*¹⁴⁷. The Scheduled Castes are recognised only among

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 63

¹⁴⁷ Animism is the belief that all things have a spirit or soul including plant, animals, rivers, moon and stars

the Hindus and Sikhs while the members of Schedules Tribes (including Karbi) may belong to other religion.¹⁴⁸ The Karbi consider each creature have a spirit that can offer help or harm to human being. As such, they believed that spirit must be worshipped or appeased. The Karbis offer prayers, sacrifices or other forms of devotion to these spirits in the hope of getting blessing or protection from harm. The hill Karbis have no specific temple or shrine and are not idol worshippers. But they are not atheist. They have a deep faith in the existence of God. The Karbis have traditionally been the worshippers of *Arnam Kethe, Hemphu-Mukrang, and Rasinja*¹⁴⁹ the creator of the heaven and the earth. They also worship the sun, moon, big rivers, water fall, mountain, large stone and trees to avert sickness or procure favourable harvest.¹⁵⁰ Depending on the purpose of worship the Karbi gods can be divided into three groups such as Hem Angtar (household god), Rongker (village god) and Dengja (regional god), and Thengpi-Thengso (ailment recovery god). But some of the Karbi tribe disowned their age-old religious belief and adopted other practices due to religious assimilation by the mainstream Assamese community.¹⁵¹

The Census of India identified and recorded that 99% of the Karbis were 'Animists' till 1931. But the Karbis, due to ignorant over their belief system, unwritten religious practices and books have been quietly replaced by 'Hindu' in the 'Animist' category from 1961 onwards. And surprisingly, 84.64% of the Karbis are shown as 'Hindus' in 2001 census. 'Hinduism', which is both a 'colonial product' and 'age-old' Indian belief system, has been imposed upon the majority 'Animist' Karbis who begun to viewed this as a threat to their religious identity.¹⁵²

Those rituals and festivities which were observed by the Karbis in the olden days are declining with the advent of modernisation. The religious waning and cultural assimilation among the Karbi society has become rampant for the past few decades. The Karbi traditional game like *Phelong keparting, Hambi kepathu, Kengdongdang* are vanishing day by day. The Karbis are exposed to the cultural life of the Middle Assam and unparalleled impact of assimilation took place in the social life.¹⁵³ The Vaishnava religion obtained a strong footing in the country in the later part of the fifteenth century when Sankardev (1449-1569) the fountain head of Bhagavati movement in Assam, appeared on the scene.¹⁵⁴ The first religious conversion began among the Karbis during the time of Srimanta Sankar Dev when few Karbis were converted to Vaishnavism. This

¹⁴⁸ See, District Census Handbook (Mikir Hills District), Guwahati: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, 1971, p.132

¹⁴⁹ Karbi traditional god and goddess, whom they believes to be the creator of heaven and earth

¹⁵⁰ Alexander Mackenzie, *The North East Frontier of India*, New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 1999, p. 214

¹⁵¹ Dhritiman Sharma, *Karbi Culture and Megaliths*, Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2014, p.63

¹⁵² Dharamsing Teron, *Karbi Studies, Vol. 2*, Guwahati: Assam Book Hive, 2011, p.7

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 75

¹⁵⁴ Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 2011, p. 289

conversion brought those Karbis closer to the life and culture of the non-tribal Assamese people and led to the fading of traditional Karbi religion.¹⁵⁵ The Karbis traditionally reared pig and fowl but while making an offering to deity *Peng* (peng karkli) they began to sacrifice a he-goat as an example of assimilation to Hindu culture. The Karbi traditional way of sacrificing animal is by slitting the throat but in the case of sacrificing goat they chop off the head in Hindu style. In the later part, some of the Karbi adopted to certain religious sect like Lokhimon, Satsang, Bhaktitom, etc. In contemporary age with the use of civic amenities and infrastructure the traditional socio-cultural life has undergone substantial changes.

3.14.3 Demographic Invasion

Permeation of people from mainland India to excluded and partially excluded areas and illegal encroachment of tribal land has not only affected the demographic equilibrium of the region but also caused massive destruction of rich biodiversity, culture and tradition of this territory. While considering the tribal population and their spatial distribution in Assam, they could be broadly classified under two groups (1) Hills Tribes, and (2) Plain Tribes. Among the Hills Tribes the Karbis and Dimasas are the most important groups. Besides Rengmas, Kukis, Hmars, Garos, Tiwas are also the dominant groups inhabiting in the hills district of Assam. The Karbis are mainly concentrated in Karbi Anglong district which is also the homeland to the tribe. Kamal Sidiq clearly elaborated how illegal immigrant obtained 'documentary citizenship'-a term that explains how paper work, often falsely obtained, confers citizenship on illegal immigrants. Mobility has become easier due to political and cultural factors, as well as the development of new transport and communication system.¹⁵⁶ The illegal immigration from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and other plain communities to the district is endangering the indigenous tribes and their identity. The steady population flow from Bengal into this territory accentuated the ethnic and religious diversity and introduced a nativist-outsider dichotomy to the simmering crisis, but certain political leaders are actually encouraging the process for their personal gain and utilize them as 'vote-banks'. Tripura is a living example when the Bengali Hindu refugees migrated from Bangladesh- within two decades the demography of Tripura has changed and the tribal population became minority in their own land. The fear that Karbi Anglong would go the '*Tripura way*'¹⁵⁷ weighed on indigenous Karbi people and this has forced the Karbis to take arms and demand for a separate statehood.

¹⁵⁵ Mondol Sing Bey, *op.cit*, p.56

¹⁵⁶ Kamal Sadiq, 'Paper Citizens: How Illegal Immigrants Acquire Citizenship in Developing Countries' *International Studies* (Volume 46 Numbers 1&2) January & April 2009 p. 253

¹⁵⁷ The term '*Tripura way*' is used to depict the picture of illegal immigrants dominating over indigenous tribes or communities.

The present population growth in Karbi Anglong has given a warning to be more cautious. The Karbis feel the days are not far behind when their population will be meager in their own homeland. The Karbi speaking population was 192, 354 (1971 Census) which increased to 58.04 compared to the last one decade. But in 1991 Census it was observed that the Karbi population was 285, 811 and was increased marginally with just 48.58 (during that period the Autonomous Statehood Movement was at the peak and as such many illegal immigrant left the district). However in 2001 Census the population was decreased to 23.68 as the total population of Karbi speaking was 353,513 compared to the total number of population of 813, 311 in the district. The population growth in Karbi Anglong according to the 2011 Census was 965,280 but the total population of the Karbis tribe was not made available with the authority till filling of this data. They have shown only the STs/SCs population of the district but tribe wise or community wise distribution of population was not made available. Whatever may be the case the population growth of the Karbis was very irregular for the past few decades whose illustrations and facts is shown in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11: Decadal Growth of Karbi Population (1971-2001)

Year	Karbi Speaking Population	Decadal Growth in percentage
1971	192,354	+58.86
1981	NA	NA
1991	285,811	+48.58
2001	353,513	+23.68
2011	NA	NA

Source: Census of India (1971-2011)

Note: NA= Not Available

The Supreme Court of India in 1958 came with a definition which started that, “minority community means a community which is numerically less than 50 percent”. The Supreme Court further held that when a Bill is passed by the State Legislature which extends to the whole of the State, the minority must be determined by reference to the total population of the State. Thus, on the basis of the Supreme Court judgment, we can define linguistic minority as any ethnic group which constitutes less than 50 percent of the total population of the State and whose mother tongue is different from the language of the majority and the official language of the State.¹⁵⁸ According to 1971 Census the Karbi speaking population was 192,354 which retained the percentage of 50.71 in the district. But after two decades the population came down to 43.12 percent. The succeeding fall of population growth of the Karbis may be perhaps the unabated influx and illegal immigrant to the district. In one decade there was only 0.34 percent which was an increase of Karbi population in the district between 1991 and 2001. And the 2011 Census still could not provide community wise population data for Karbi Anglong. Such case is rarely found elsewhere in the world. If this scenario goes on, the total extinction of

¹⁵⁸ Pauthang Haokip, Ibid, p. 57

indigenous people shall come to happen in the short span of time. And the demographic invasion is not an isolated issue, but it is an organic part of the question of subjugation and occupation. The Karbis becoming minority in their own land is clearly shown in Table 3.12.

Table 3.12: Karbi Speaking Population in Karbi Anglong from 1971-2011

Year	Population in Karbi Anglong	Karbi speaking Population	Karbi Population (in percent)
1971	379,310	192,354	50.71%
1981*	NA	NA	NA
1991	662,723	285,811	43.12%
2001	813,311	353,513	43.46%
2011	956,313	NA	NA

*No Census was carried out in Assam due to Assam agitation, NA=Not Available

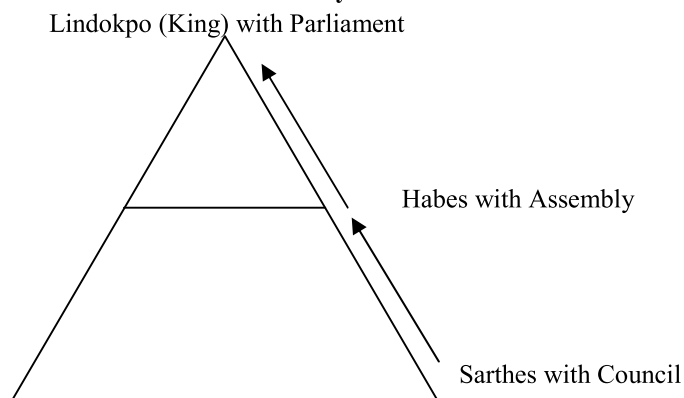
Sources: Census of India 1971-2011 (Office of the Registrar General, Government of India)

The demographic invasion upon the indigenous people in general and Karbi tribe in particular have been going on in this part of the region since India's Independence. There were torrents infiltrations of unfamiliar people from mainland India for the past six decades which have not only affected the genetic but also resulted into ethnic violence. .

3.14.4 Subjugation of Traditional Administrative System

The traditional capital of the Karbis was at *Ronghang Rongbong*. This place is also known as *Nij Ronghang*. There was a parliament called *Pinpomar*. The *Pinpomar* controls over the social and ritualistic matters of the Karbis. In the good old days, the *Pinpomar Amei* had real and effective powers.¹⁵⁹

Figure 3.1: Three-tier Traditional Administrative System of the Karbi Society



¹⁵⁹ Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *op.cit.*, p.52

The Karbi traditional society is governed by a three-tier system of administration. At the top the King or Lindokpo, at the middle the Habes and at the grass root level the Sarthes. Although the system is disintegrating with the influence of modern administration and is disappearing in the Karbi Society,¹⁶⁰ the Karbi King still plays important role in the socio-religious life of the Karbi people as shown in Figure 2.

The Karbi have four traditional administrative segments which are Ronghang Longri (Ronghang Kingdom), Chinthong Longri (Chinthong Kingdom), Amri Longri (Amri Kingdom) and Hot-Havar (equivalent to present day Union Territory). While migrating eastward from the Kopili region, Amri stayed behind while Ronghang and Chinthong waited for him as they moved from stage to stage. At last, on arriving at Donsuri (Dhansiri) river, Ronghang and Chingthong are the only two sections. The laggard Amri afterward arrived, but was not given full fellowship in their fold. Amri has no honour at the general festivals and will not receive his portion of rice-beer at the feasts, instead he has to get share from those of the other two.¹⁶¹

At present the traditional administrative system exist only in the Hamren Sub-division. The Karbis of Rongkhang, Chinthong and Amri areas still follow their own traditional systems of administration.¹⁶² The Ronghang Kingdom has twelve *Havar* (equivalent to present State). The Chingthong Kingdom has three *Havar* and the Amri has two *Havar*. Under each *Havar* there will be several Rong Amei (Village Council) which decetralizes power to the grass root level. The Council will presided over by the Sarthe which will be assisted by the Assistant Sarthe called *Ronghang Asar* or *Chingthong Asar*.

The capital of the Longri is called 'Rongbong' in Karbi. Therefore the capital of the Ronghang Longri is popularly known as 'Ronghang Rongbong'. The chief of the Longri is known as 'Lindokpo'. He is the social chief of the Longri. The Lindokpo don't have military power. He carries out the social administration of Ronghang Longri with the help of officials who are popularly known as Ronghang Longri Pinpomar Amei equivalent to the present Parliament. The Lindokpo has the executive, legislative and judiciary controls that are entrusted to Pinpomar Amei.¹⁶³

The Lindokpo sometimes offer sacrifice to the Deity called 'Blai Thelen'. It is the worship of snake (Python) popularly known as 'Pirthat' in Karbi. The ritual holds once in every year, but there is no fixed date for the purpose. The Lindokpo performs the ritual so

¹⁶⁰ Dhritiman Sharma, *op.cit.*, p.40

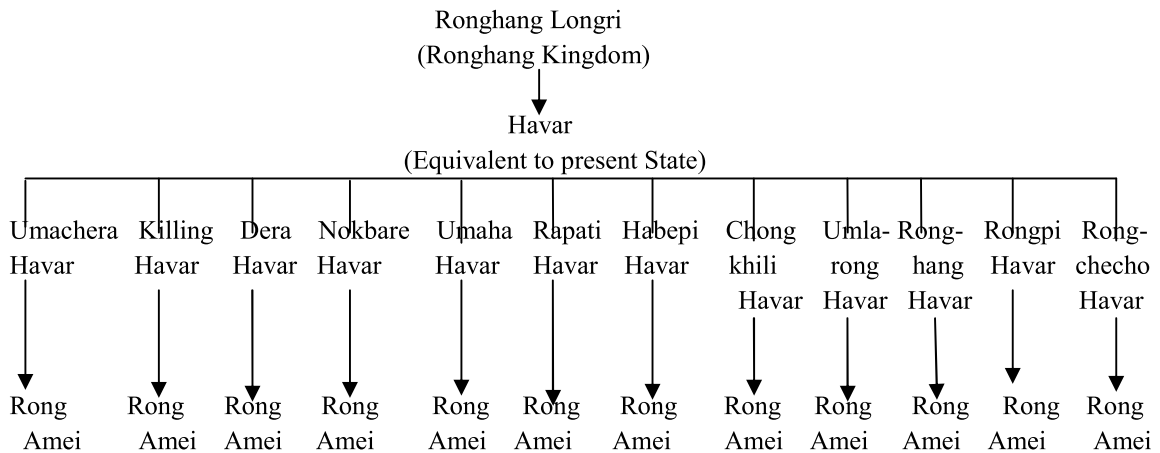
¹⁶¹ Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs*, Guwahati: United Publishers, 1908, p. 15

¹⁶² Phukan Ch., Phangcho, *The Karbis of North-East India*, Guwahati: AngGik Prakashan, 2003, p. 74

¹⁶³ Das, Girindra Nath (eds.) *Tribal Tradition & Development in the Hills areas, Assam*. Guwahati: Tribal Research Centre, 2006

that he can rule over his subjects equally and peacefully. The Figure 3.2 shows the traditional administrative system of Ronghang Longri.

Figure 3.2: Traditional Administrative System of Ronghang Longri



‘Lindokpo’ has to be selected democratically and after his demise, the members of the respective clan select a person who is well conversed with the traditional customs. The adviser of the Lindokpo may be classified into two categories- civil and ritual. The first group will look after civil or secular matters and the second group will look after the ritual related matter. The decision is taken by the Lindokpo in council who has both the coercive and judicial powers. The Lindokpo and the advisers exercise enormous power over socio-political affairs. There existed an indigenous means of communication among social dignitaries using a symbol called ‘Lam Kido’ made out of bamboo splits. The ‘Lam Kido’ had its origin in Western part of Karbi Anglong and its use is still practiced. Lam Kido often referred as only Kido, is the official means of communication between Lindokpo and his subordinate Habe, who looks after the customs and traditions of the Longri. Only the Lindokpo enjoy the privilege of sanctioning the making of Kido which of course is preceded by discussion in the traditional council. The seriousness of the crime is judged by the closely woven nature of the Kido or Royal letter and carried by an important officer like Mutiyar or Pherangke. The content of the letter is coded in the form of knots in the tail part of the Kido. The more close the Kido is knitted; the more urgent is the matter. Though the message for the Habe is verbally passed through the Pherangke (messenger), the message will be considered authentic only if it is accompanied by Kido from the sender-Lindokpo.

The Lindokpo can be impeached if he is found guilty of adultery, quarrel, excessive drinking of wine and disloyalty to the rules and regulations of the Pinpomar Amei. The method of impeachment is not an easy one. The Lindokpo can be removed from his post on the following grounds:-

- i. When a Lindokpo is found physically unfit due to sudden accident.
- ii. When a Lindokpo commits adultery by marrying two wives.

The Ronghang Kingdom has four 'Artu' also known as 'Pinpo Arong' which means village of the Pinpos. It is the constellation of some houses of the Ronghang Longri in the Ronghang Rongbong. They are selected from the villages by a Lindokpo to represent the Artu. In Ronghang Kingdom the four Artu are (i) Ronghang Artu, (ii) Rongchecho Artu, (iii) Rongpi Artu and (iv) Killing Artu.¹⁶⁴ The Pinpos of the four Artu in Ronghang Kingdom formed the 'Pinpomar Amei' is equivalent to present Parliament. The Pinpomar Amei of the Ronghang Kingdom consists of the following office bearers:- (i) Katharpo, (ii) Dengjapo, (iii) Brutemen, (iv) Pherangke, (v) Dilipo and (vi) Mutiyar. They are the distinct persons in the field of traditional, cultural and customary law. The legislative, executive and judiciary power are entrusted to the Pinpomar. The administration of the Kingdom primarily depends upon the Pinpomar. Only when the Pinpomar fails to decide any case, it will then refer to the Lindokpo whose decision will be considered as final and binding.

The office of priesthood is exclusively for the Kathar family and no other member belonging to other clan is entitled to the concerned post. The priest is called 'Katharpo' and only he can offer worship to the deity. The Kathar Riso assists him on the occasion of worship. The Katharpo worships the deity of weather and performs a ritual of 'Botor Kekur'. This worship is offered to 'weather deity' for invoking timely monsoon. He even foretells signs of omen and imminent danger for the preceding year. He also performs worship of other deity for peace and prosperity of the Karbi tribe in particular and the world in general. There was no such fixed date earlier. Now-a-days, the ceremony starts from March 9 and ends on March 10 every year. The Habes from different Havar attend the occasion.

The post of Dengjapo is reserved for Teron clan only. There are two post for Dengja namely – (i) Dengja Kethe and (ii) Dengja Riso. The Dengja kethe especially worships the deity of Tiger. And the ritual is called 'Dovanso Rongker' in Karbi. This kind of worship needs human sacrifice. It is performed to get protection of attack or killing of men by tigers. The Dovanso Rongker is performed once in every five years. The prey come voluntarily and approaches the village people. He would behave like an animal; the Dengjapo then understands the reasons and in due time, he is offered to the deity. It is learnt that the sacrifice of human was made at the early part of 1965 by late Mensing Teron, the Dengja Kethe. But these days, human sacrifice is not in vogue.

¹⁶⁴ Mondol Sing Bey, *A glimpse of the socio-political evolution of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong of Assam*, Diphu: Bimola Teronpi and Pirbee Beypi, 2005 pp. 10-55

The post of '*Brutemen*' is also reserved in a Kingdom. The word '*Brutemen*' is derived from a Khasi word. In Karbi it is called '*Phuman-Phulok*' or '*Mekar kesar*' which means 'experience mind' and 'legal expert'. He has to extend all possible help towards the Habe in taking decision of the trial.

There is the post of '*Dilipo*' in the Ronghang Kingdom. The '*Dilipo*' is a very important post in relation to the administration of a Kingdom. The Dilipo is considered as the most trustworthy person of the Lindokpo. He is the chief security officer of the Kingdom and has the responsibility to protect the Lindokpo from any attack. Sometime he promulgates discretionary power on behalf of the Lindokpo. He also acts as intelligence bureau to the Lindokpo. There are two posts of the Dilipo- (i) Dili Kethe and (ii) Dili Pator. One of the Dilis has to be chosen from Terang Dili clan, a sub-clan of Terang and another from Dili from Timung Pator clan, a sub clan of Timung.

The organizer of '*Longri Amei*' is called '*Mutiyar*' which is an important post of Ronghang Kingdom. To bring upto maturity stage of '*Longri Amei*, the heavy responsibility fall upon the '*Mutiyar*'. It is his duty to pursue the '*Sarthe*' to attend the meeting which is convened by the Habe. There will be four '*Mutiyar*' in a Kingdom.

The '*Hemai*' are the Assistant Mutiyar. They have to shoulder the responsibilities in absence of the Mutiyar. Further, they have to take care of the materials which are of use to the Habe during the hour of meeting of trial.¹⁶⁵

There is '*Havar*' in the Ronghang Longri which is equivalent to the present State. For the smooth functioning of the Ronghang Longri, it is divided into twelve Havar. The head of the Havar is called '*Habe*' in Karbi. He is appointed by the King to carry out the social administration of the Havar on his behalf. The Habe carries out the administration through the '*Havar Amei*' equivalent to the present State Assembly. He is the interpreter and custodian of the social laws of the society. Effective functioning of the '*Havar Amei*' primarily depends on the Habe. He also acts as the mediator between the '*Sarthe*' and the '*Pinpomar*' of the Artu. If the settlement of the disputes cannot be accepted by either party, the cases are to be referred to the Pinpomar Amei of the Longri.

The wife of the Habe is called '*Sikopi*'. She is accepted as the ideal leader of the women. She is honoured and held at high esteem. When a Sikoipi dies the Habe can remarry from the close relatives of the Sikopi. If suitable partner is not available, he may select someone from the same clan of his former Sikopi.

¹⁶⁵ G.N. Das, 'A Glimpse into the Institution of Karbi Kingship and its Functionaries', *Bulletin*, (Vol. I No.VIII) 1992 p. 28

The head of the village council is called '*Sarthe*' in Karbi. He is appointed by the Habe to assist him in the village level administration. He played an important role in the village administration. He takes control over the social and judicial matter of the village. During any special occasion in the village he will be the first person to be invited with honour. Of course he has no power to take up the murder cases and sex offences (Kur Senem) which are within the power of the Habe or the Londokpo. But other cases are within the jurisdiction of the Sarthe.

The *Rong Amei* (Village Council) is the smallest and lowest level of administrative system of the Karbi society. The daily administration of each village is run by the village council. Each meeting of the village council is presided over by the Sarthe. All adult members of the village can be the members of the village council and they are known as *Chakri* in Karbi. In a village council, the number of Chakri is not limited and each of the *Mekar* (subjects) of the village also can become a member and take active part in the organization of their village.¹⁶⁶ The Rong Amei generally consists of the following office bearers: (1) Ronghang asar or Chinthong asar (2) Risa basa (3) Pherangke and (4) Deuri.

The Assistant Sarthe is called '*Ronghang asar*' or '*Chinthong asar*' in Karbi. Generally, in Karbi society there is existing social rite to recognize the head of a village as Ronghang aso, Chinthong aso or Amri aso. For instance, if a man belongs to Rongpi but his forefather once had been in the Ronghang Kingdom, then he will be known as Rongpi (Ronghang aso) or if a man belongs to Terang but his forefather happened to be in the Chinthong Kingdom then he will be known as Terang (Chinthong aso) or if a man belongs to Timung but his forefather once lived in the Amri Kingdom he will be known as Timung (Amri aso). Here, Rongpi, Terang and Timung are the title and Ronghang aso, Chingthong aso or Amri aso are tagged to signify that his forefather had been in the Kingdom. If the village Sarthe is Rongpi (Ronghang aso) then a person belonging to Terang, Timung, Teron (Chinthong aso) will be selected for the post of Chinthong asar.

'*Riso basa*' is the third village headman in the village. The main duty of Riso basa is to help the Sarthe to carry out the village administration in relation to youth participation in the village festival or special events.

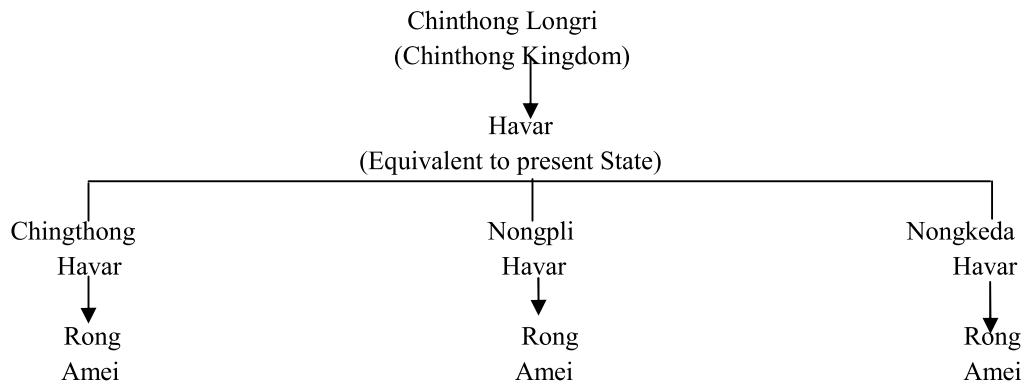
'*Pherangke*' occupies an important post in the Kingdom. His duty is to inform the village people when a meeting is summoned by the 'Sarthe'. Moreover he has to arrange food and lodging for the guests present in the meeting of the village or Kingdom.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

'Deuri' is a man who takes the responsibility for treatment. He may be called as village doctor who give treatment to the villagers. He even presages the diagnosis of the disease for early recovery.

The administrative system of Chinthong Longri (Chinthong Kingdom) is quite similar with the Ronghang Kingdom. In the Chingthong Longri there are three 'Havar' namely (i) Chinthong Havar, (ii) Nongpli Havar and (iii) Nongkeda Havar.¹⁶⁷ The Lindokpo, Pinpo and Pinpomar Amei, Dilipo, Katharpo even exist in Chinthong Longri too. The Figure 3.3 shows the traditional administrative system of Chinthong Longri.

Figure 3.3: Traditional Administrative System of Chinthong Longri



There is the post of 'Patorpo' in Chinthong Longri. The Patorpo of the Chinthong Longri is from Senar, sub-clan of Timung. The duty of Patorpo is to help the Lindokpo in the administration of law and his duty is to bring the person who is disloyal to the Lindokpo.

'Bor Senot' and 'Senot' play important role in the administration of Chinthong Longri. They have to counsel the Lindokpo in the interpretation of the social law of the society. There are two posts of Bor Senot in the Chinthong Longri. One has to be selected from the clan of Rongphar, sub clan of Timung. And another has to be selected from Bey clan. Besides, there are three Senot in the Chinthong Longri which has to be selected from Kro, Ingti and Tokbi clan respectively.

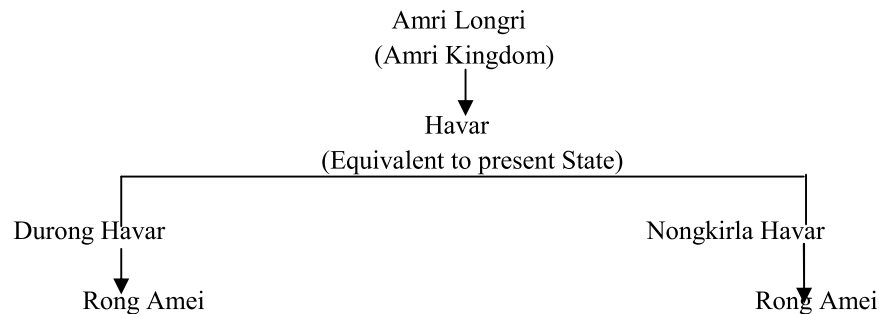
There is the post of 'Mijipo' in the Chinthong Longri. There are three posts of Mijipo in Chinthong Longri. The Ingti clan is the Mijipo for Chinthong Artu; Hanse, sub-clan of Inghi for Nongpli Artu; and Rongpi, sub-clan of Inghi for Nongkeda Artu. Their responsibility is to give counsel to the Lindokpo in the interpretation of social law.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 28

In addition, the Havar, Habe, Sathé, Rong Amei (village council), Rong asar, Chinthong asar, Riso basa, Pherangke and Deuri also exist in the Chinthong Longri just as in the Ronghang Longri. Their qualification, powers and functions are also remain the same with the Ronghang Longri.

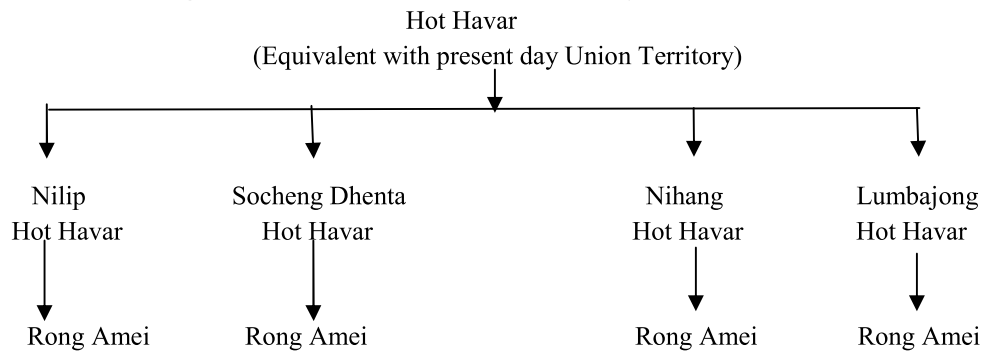
The capital of Amri Longri (Amri Kingdom) is called ‘*Amri Rongbong*’. And there are two ‘Havar’ in Amri Kingdom namely- Durong Havar and Nongkirla Havar. The Havar of Amri Rongbong has occupied an important role in the social administration of Amri Longri. The Havar of Amri Rongbong is known as ‘Pinpo Arong’. The Lindokpo, Pinpo, Pinpomar Amei, Dilipo, Senotpo, Patorpo and Mijipo exist in the Amri Longri as we have found in Ronghang Longri. The Habe, Sarthe and Rong Amei (village council) too exist in the Amri Longri. The Figure 3.4 shows the traditional administrative system of Amri Longri.

Figure 3.4: Traditional Administrative System of Amri Longri



There are four *Hot Havar* (equivalent to present Union Territories) divided in the traditional administrative system like (i) Nilip Hot Havar, (ii) Socheng Dhenta Hot Havar, (iii) Nihang Hot Havar and (iv) Lumbajong Hot Havar for smooth social administration and decentralization of power. During the reign of Harlongphu Lindok Ronghang in Ronghang Kingdom some incident took place. On the bank of Kopili there ensued a feud between the Karbis and *Parok* (Non-Karbis) over extension of boundary. And Harlongphu Lindok felt the exigency of having Hot Havar for protection of the Karbis from any intruder to Karbi territory and unprovoked attack. For the smooth functioning of the Hot Havar, the Lindokpo appointed ‘*Hot Asar*’ (equivalent power and function to the present Lieutenant Governor). The Karbi Heroes namely Vejeng Hanse, Thanglong Timung, Bikhakangburva Tokbi, Sirvomu Tokbi, Jeksai Ingti and Waisong Terang had been appointed as Hot Asar to rule over the Hot Havar. The present Karbi Anglong district headquarter Diphu is under Lumbajong Hot Havar. Each Hot Havar has again several Rong Amei (village council) which decentralized power to the grassroots level just like other three Kingdoms of the Karbi social administrative system in Hot Havar. The Figure 3.5 shows the administrative system of Hot Havar.

Figure 3.5: Traditional Administrative System of Hot Havar



On the other hand, the Rules for the Administration of Justice and Police in Sibsagar, Nowgong and Mikir Hills Tracts (Mikir Hills) under No. 2617 A.P. March 29, 1979 and The Mikir Hills Autonomous District (Administrative of Justice) Rules, 1954 can not be put into practice though it still exist. The MHAD (AJ) Rules 1954 was supposed to replace the Rules of 1937 under section 59 (1) of the MHAD (AJ) Rules 1954. But the Rules of 1954 themselves could become functional only from the day the “Appointed Day” is published in the Assam Gazette. Surprisingly, 60 years has passed but it has not been published in the Assam Gazette. This means that MHAD (AJ) Rules, 1954 has not become functional law and therefore, the Rules of 1937 has not been repealed till today.¹⁶⁸

Except in Karbi Anglong district, all other district councils have enacted laws for the administration of justice. The codes of civil and criminal procedure were not introduced into the Hills areas. But the spirit of these codes was observed by the administrators. Thus, there was judicial autonomy in the Hills areas.¹⁶⁹

The traditional or customary laws, rules and regulations are unwritten and uncodified. These laws are able to achieve a public sanction because of its unhindered continuity in public life. The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Act of 1954 also provides that all disputes in the region are to be settled by customary law.¹⁷⁰ Earlier the decisions of these institutions were brutal, but progressively it has taken a more moderate form, whereby they give punishment most of the time in kind, by looking into the gravity of the offences. Though the Karbis have strong customary law, it has now become moldy due to legal, social and economic factors. The legitimization of the actions of the traditional institutions in local governance mostly depends on the customary laws and

¹⁶⁸ See, the Mikir Hills Autonomous (Administration of Justice) Rules, 1954

¹⁶⁹ Rao, V.Venkata and Niru Hazarika, *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol.1*, New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd, 1983, p.217.

¹⁷⁰ Jeuti Barooah, *Customary Laws of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong in Assam*, Guwahati: Law Research Institute, 2007

practices it follow. To avoid confusion there is urgent need to compile the customary laws of the Karbis in order to preserve their traditional and age old practices and belief.
171

3.14.5 Economic Exploitation

Agriculture is the backbone of economy in the territory, though agriculture itself is not yet developed as commercial venture. Most of the agricultural land even in the plains of Karbi Anglong is cultivated once in a year or once in two years. Majority of the people in the hill district practice jhum (shifting) cultivation. In Karbi Anglong district, about 70% of the people are dependent on Jhum cultivation. The people cultivate on the same plot of land after an interval of 8-10 years. So, the people have to move from one hillock to another in search of new plots of jhum land. But at present, due to population pressure on land, the jhum cycle has been reduced to 4 to 5 years and even in some areas, the jhum cycle has been reduced to 2-3 years.

The economic condition of Karbi Anglong did not change after sixty five years of India's independence. The people are placid and complacent in their limited means and consumption though the district is rich in forest and mineral resources. Various mineral resources like *Limestone* are found in Dillai and Sainilangso area, *China-clay* are available in Upper Deopani and Silonijan Area, *Feldspar* is found in Koilalangso area, *Coal* is found in Dillai, Koilamati, Arlongrupat and Khonbamon area and *Hard granite or gneiss* are found in the Hamren Sub-Division particularly in Vothatlangso and Dongkamukam areas of the district. The occurrence of oil and natural gas has been reported from a place near Koilalangso of the territory. But no initiatives have taken up by the state government to tap the resources or establish industry for employment generation in the territory. Lack of employment and other sources to earn their livelihood led to economic ruin of the people.

The district has also a scope to develop tourism, enough water resources to generate power for big industry. In spite of that, the economic conditions of the people are low compared to other districts in the state due to negligence on the part of the government. There is only one central run cement plant in the district at Bokajan but bulk of the workers and managerial staffs are from outside the state. The local unemployed youth are not given any opportunity, as the decision-makers are from outside the Karbi Anglong. The territory has few private owned tea estates, rubber plantation, citronella plantation but the prices are fixed from above and the cultivators are reaping a minimum profit. Urbanization in Karbi Anglong district has assumed a limited shape due to the fact

¹⁷¹ Alaka Sarmah, 'Role of traditional Institutions in Governance- Experience from Karbi Anglong, Assam' *Dialogue* (Vol. 13 No. 2) October-December 2011 p. 184

that no large scale industries have taken place so far. Assam Hills Small Industries Development Corporation Limited (AHSIDC) was founded in the year 1968 but started functioning in 1974. The corporation has limited its activities due to shortage of funds and other issues. The Fruit Preservation Unit (FPU) at Havaipur and Sugar Mill at Kolonga has become non functional for long. The corporation is somehow running by manufacturing of packaged drinking water, fruit juice, etc. in a place like Deithor, Manja. But it doesn't solve the unemployment issue in the district as only few members are employed in the small industry. Adequate communication facilities are not available in the territory and no systematic marketing facilities are arranged for the people. All these have led to major economic barrier in the way of improving living standard of the people.

Power is the basic infrastructural requirement for the growth of industries in particular and economic development of the region as a whole. Karbi Anglong has vast potentiality of power ranging from hydel to natural gas but the progress of the district is very low. There still exists a wide gap between availability and demand for power in the district. Karbi Langpi Hydro Electric Project (100 MW) is the only major project of the Karbi Anglong district which was completed in the year 2006. It has enough power to electrified entire district but only 9% of the villages are electrified.¹⁷² The total number of villages covered by electricity in this district is just 1380 villages.¹⁷³

Besides, there is Longsokangthu Micro Hydel Projects (Longnit) and Dikrutpi Micro Hydel Project (Paklongkam) located at a distance of 18 km from Dokmoka which is non-functional. All these systematic marginalization and economic exploitation carried out by the state has created a sense of insecurity to the tribal living in the hill district of Assam.

In the present study it has been found that the employment sectors- both private and public sector operating under Karbi Anglong Autonomus Council (KAAC) has maximum employees of non-tribal population.

For the purpose of the present study the researcher went to the office of Deputy Director of Employment Exchange to provide the data of communitywise distribution of jobs in the district but it could not prepare and provide the exact number of Karbi employees working under public or private sectors. As the researcher is the native of the district and through personal observation it is rational to say that the Karbi employees in public sector is comparatively less and this has contributed for economic exploitation of

¹⁷² Development Scenario of Karbi Anglong District (2004), Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati, p.72

¹⁷³ The Assam Tribune, April 7, 2008.

the indigenous people. The employment in the organised sector in Karbi Anglong district is shown in Table 3.13

Table 3.13: Employment in the Organised Sector in Karbi Anglong District

Year	Public Sector			Private Sector			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
1997-98	12,082	3,754	15,836	3,314	1,050	4,364	20,200
1998-99	12,151	3,821	15,972	3,420	1,155	4,575	20,547
1999-00	12,475	3,845	16,320	1,941	1,021	2,962	19,282
2000-01	14,791	2,564	17,355	1,197	1,072	2,262	19,617
2001-02	14,086	2,248	16,334	1,181	1,018	2,199	18,533
2002-03	13,981	3,253	17,234	1,161	974	2,135	19,369
2003-04	13,942	3,279	17,221	1,085	934	2,019	19,240
2004-05	13,894	3,316	17,210	1,167	1,021	2,188	19,398
2005-06	13,868	3,310	17,178	1,159	1,015	2,174	19,352
2006-07	13,857	3,341	17,198	1,162	1,025	2,187	19,385

Sources: Deputy Director of Employment Exchange, Diphu, Karbi Anglong.

Besides tribals, large number of non-tribals was flocking into this territory. Majority of the people engaged in trade and business in this district are non-tribal people who have migrated from different parts of the country. Unlike other districts of Assam, the two hill districts were found to be a green pasture for the migrant labourers. Once they enter Karbi Anglong the migrant labourers never think of going back and this has created unemployment and economic inconsistency in the district. Of late, due to the pressure on unemployment, local tribal have started venturing into the business sector and many local educated youth started driving auto-rickshaw for their livelihood. The tribal youths view that the non-tribals as the stumbling blocks to their livelihood and job opportunities. Till date, no mechanism has been developed to accommodate the educated local youth in different sectors in the district by the authority. This sense of deprivation has led them to strengthen the statehood movement. They sense that only by having statehood and their own government can solve the utmost crisis in the territory. Out of frustration and disappointment some of the youth began to take arms to pressurize the government on Karbi's demand. The economic conditions of the people in the district had never been satisfactory compared to other districts of the state. The people became gradually frustrated after comparing their deplorable condition with those of their counterpart in the rest of the country.

3.14.6 Land alienation

In many areas of the country, tribals they either were unable to resist the gradual alienation of their ancestral land, move further into hills and tracts of marginal land, or accepted the economic status of tenants or agricultural labourers on the land their

forefathers had once owned. In most areas, encroachment on land held by tribes continued even in the face of protective legislation. The then Prime Minister Nehru has rightly said, 'Tribal rights on land and forest should be respected and no outsider should be able to take possession of tribal lands. The incursion of the market economy into tribal areas had to be strictly controlled and regulated.' To find out the underlying causes of development of such community specific organizations Hiren Gohain rightly argued 'There has never been a sincere attempt on the part of Assamese to uplift the tribals' brethren to their level through reservation and other available constitutional method. Since the state machinery is dominated by the Assamese cast-Hindu, reservation in job and educational institutions has been sabotage through neglect and obstructionism. And the worse part is that the tribal people are totally insecure. With rapid loss of land in areas reserved for them as tribal belt and blocks, there is no lack of evidence that this important safeguard has been hollow to begin with and has been made meaningless by the way it has been enforced'.¹⁷⁴

Land alienation in India's North-East has led to serious ethnic tension. In the past 30 years, land alienation has been at the root cause of the most horrible, headline-grabbing ethnic carnages that have shaken the region. In Tripura, at least 300 Bengali Hindu settlers were butchered by indigenous tribals in the Mandai massacre in June, 1980.¹⁷⁵ In just one day in February 1983, more than 2000 Bengali Muslims were massacred by the Tiwa (Lalung) tribesmen in Nellie in central Assam to whom they had lost lands. The free-for-all violence was marked by the absence of a single target community. The only uniform trend was that the attackers were tribal whereas the target communities were non-tribals including Assamese caste Hindu, Bengali Hindus, Muslim of Bengali origin, Nepali and migrants from Bihar. In Manipur, Naga militants beheaded 87 Kuki villagers in one night at Zopuii in February 1993 over land issues. Investigation revealed that armed militants representing ethnic group formed the core group that perpetrated the violence. There were also signs of systematic incitement in an atmosphere already vitiated by agitation or militancy. However, the high numbers of casualties during the massacres were caused by the extensive participation of the local peasantry, who resent loss of land to settlers. The nature of injury in most cases also indicated the high level of local involvement as most victims were killed by cut and stabs rather than by firearm. The size of the armed mob, often running into hundred and sometime into thousands, confirm the trend.¹⁷⁶

In Assam, 'Tribal' are those person who belongs to one of the Schedule Tribes specified as such by order made by the President of India under Article 342 (1) of the Constitution of India in so far as the specification pertains to the Autonomous District of

¹⁷⁴ *The Telegraph*, February 8, 1991.

¹⁷⁵ J.B. Bhattacharjee, *op.cit.*, 2007, p. 11

¹⁷⁶ Subir Bhaumik, *op.cit.*, 2009, pp. 62-71

Assam. And the 'land' includes benefits which reap out from the land and things attached to the earth but shall exclude mineral, natural gas and petroleum. The tribal land were protected and controlled as per Act No. II of 1959. The Act was published in the Assam Gazette, dated June 24, 1959. But still, the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation 1886 was in practice. This regulation has curtailed the rights of the village communities quite considerably.¹⁷⁷

The present study has found land alienation as one of the root causes of unrest in Karbi Anglong. Land alienation resulted mainly from large scale influx of immigrants from Bangladesh, Nepal and non-tribals within the country. In 1952 the Assam Government has brought 450 Bengali Hindu families from erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and allowed them to reside at Uttar Borbil in the Sixth Schedule district of Karbi Anglong for their 'vote bank' politics. The tribals there were in occupation of the land under their traditional customary law but they were evicted. In the two hill districts of Assam (Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao), the formal transfer of land from tribal to non-tribal is only nominal but the actual transfer is very extensive. The report authored by the Tribal Research Institute, indicates that through the system of Pakis, Sukti Bandhak, Koi Bandhak and Mena, large swathes of tribal lands were passed into the hands of non-tribals. Tribals continues to practice *jhum* or shifting cultivation in these two hill districts, taking advantage of which the non-tribals have grown crops in their lands and earned a much better surplus income that is subsequently used to corner more land assets. The report concluded that "Within the next few years, temporary alienation of land might lead to complete distortion of the tribal economy if it is not nipped in the bud".¹⁷⁸

In Karbi Anglong district there is enough vacant land to accommodate the future growth of the tribal population. But the government has rehabilitated thousands of East Pakistanis and several thousands other has encroached upon such land conspire with the departmental officials. This happened in Pranprilangso area of Langkaijan, Uttor Borbil, Rechohidi area, Patradisa, Kheroni, Bokajan overriding the Mikir Hills District (Transfer of land) Act, 1959. Sales and mortgages of their land have been going on unchecked. There are several villages where the tribals (Karbis) have been reduced to a smaller minority due to the unchecked influx of the immigrant and occupation to their land. These individuals have reduced many tribal families into landlessness and created miserable situation. The small size tribal land holders are the victims as land being their only alternative to meet the requirement. Once dispossessed of their land they are reduced

¹⁷⁷ Ashish Bose, *et.al.*, (ed.), *op.cit.*, 1990, p.79

¹⁷⁸ See, The problem of Transfer and Alienation of Tribal Land in Assam issued by the Assam Tribal Research Institute, Guwahati, 1974

to daily wage labourers. In Karbi Anglong vast areas of land are encroached by the non-tribals that have led the Karbis into landless family in their own land.

History has rightly recorded that when Major John Butler was deputed by the then Governor General, North East Frontier in 1841 to look into the tribal problems of North East India, he started touring the hills areas of Assam from Bamuni, Dubboka (present Doboka), Arlongrupat (Silbheta), Mohongdichua (Mohendijua), Dimapur to North Cachar Hills of Barak Valley. According to his report- Karbi (then Mikir) country extends from Kuleanee River East to Jamuna River West of Dubboka. On the North, Mikir Hills was bounded by the plain of Mikirpar Mohol, Rongbekur, Kajironga (Kaziranga) and Bokaghat. The Karbi villages and their cultivation extend eastward as far as river Kuleanee in Morung (present Morongi) of Golaghat district.¹⁷⁹

Failure in protecting tribal land in the hill district and encroachment by the non-tribal has created a feeling of neglect and deprivation by the people. In view to protect and promote the interest of the tribal people necessary provision and regulation and control of transfer of land in the Karbi Anglong district was passed. In Section 3 of The Karbi Anglong (Transfer of Land) Act, 1959 enacted that, 'No land under District Council shall be sold, mortgage, leased, bartered, gifted or otherwise transferred by a tribal to a non-tribal or a non-tribal to another non-tribal except with the previous permission of the Executive Committee (EC)'.¹⁸⁰ But now all this can be found only in pen and paper and this has worried much the tribals living in the district. Overriding the Karbi Anglong (Transfer of Land) Act, 1959 and without the permission of EC the tribal land were sold, mortgaged, leased to the non-tribals. The result is that many of the fellow tribals have either become daily wage earners or have migrated to other parts of the state to try their fate.

Karbi Anglong is geographically the largest district in Assam which covers an area of 10,434 sq. km and nearly 50% or 48.89 sq. km of the land is indicated for reserved forest, wildlife sanctuaries and were claimed by the forest department. There is a vague suggestion in some quarters that it might be an extension of the approach underlying Assam Land and Land Revenue Regulation 1886 in the Preamble of which it was stated that "the successive conquest of districts or portions of district including the hill districts has been held to have extinguished all private rights in land previously existing".¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ John Butler, *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam, During a Residence of Fourteen Years*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2004

¹⁸⁰ The Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council Code- Vol-1, 1987, P.19

¹⁸¹ See, India's Forest Department, Letter No. 223E, dated January 28, 1890.

But such a colonial proclamation is repugnant to the democratic ethos of free India and cannot be adhered to the rules made by them as the country has the right to amend and invoke new rules and regulations for the welfare of the people. The Table 3.14 shows the systematic marginalization made to the indigenous tribal by the government in the name of protecting forest resources and wildlife.

Table 3.14: Forest and Wildlife Sanctuaries covered in Karbi Anglong

* RF and *WS	(in Sq. km)	in Percent
State Reserve Forest	: 1962.06 Sq. Kms	18.80%
District Reserve Forest	: 1011.26 Sq. Kms	9.69%
Wildlife Sanctuaries	: 812.73 Sq. Kms	7.78%
Proposed Reserved Forest	: 1317.01 Sq. Kms	12.62%
Total area covered	4290.33 Sq. Kms	48.89%

Sources: Conservator of Forests, Karbi Anglong, Diphu

*RF=Reserved Forest, *WS=Wildlife Sanctuaries

This systematic marginalization of the tribal population and grabbing of tribal land by the government has created concern to the people. The human population in the district will increase in the years to come but there is no provision to accommodate the future generation of the hill tribals. The authority is now giving much important to preserve forest and wildlife rather than the indigenous tribals in the district.

The Karbis have also been losing their ancestral land, not necessarily to outsiders but to their own wealthier kinsmen. Thousands of hectares of agriculture or jhuming land were forcibly grabbed and bought by them for rubber, tea and other plantation purpose. This again has forced many landless peasants to migrate to the town. The periphery of Karbi Anglong district headquarter Diphu depicted the best picture where thousand hectares of land belongs to the government and some individuals land are forcibly encroached by the landless peasants. Many of the settlers are migrated from rural areas and are economically poor. The poor and ignorant who cannot cope with the urban life style recruited to militancy. Neither the Karbi Anglong (Transfer of Land) Act of 1959 nor the tribal dominated Autonomous District Council could prevent the alienation of tribal lands because non-tribals who are determined to take over tribal lands have always found ever-new ways to hoodwink local authorities. Failures in protecting the rights and tribal lands have created unrest and bloodshed in the hill district of Assam. And many of the militant leaders exposed land alienation by illegal immigrants and outsider contributed for the growth of Karbi Militant Movement in Assam.

3.14.7 Exertion of Sub-National Identity

After the country attained its independence, the political leaders slowly started indulging in more and more power thirsty politics rather than uniting all the ethnic tribes

and communities for nation-building. Violation of rights of the indigenous has led to sub-nationalism exertion of the people. When their territory, language, religion, caste and reservation were encroached by the dominant group of the state the indigenous people started to feel deprived and lax. The geographical areas of the district are becoming smaller and smaller now which only exist in pen and paper. Large chunk of land were encroached by neighbouring districts of Assam. Places like Borpathar, Kaziranga, Salona, Kaki Reserve, Klurdung were intruded by non-tribal population. Culturally the Karbis feel discernment of threat on their very survival and feeling of being discriminated at the hands of the larger Assamese society.

In the political arena of the state, the hills tribes were neglected considerably. The district has only four seats reserved in the state Assembly and one seat is reserved for Member of Parliament from the two hill districts of Assam which is blatant to the hills tribes of the state. The excessive state interference to the powers and functions of the autonomous council has deprived the freedom of the hill people in particular. And the militant leaders believed that through exertion of their sub-national identity they could revive the lost culture of the Karbi. All the factors that explained above have contributed for the genesis of Karbi militancy in Assam. .

3.15 Chapter Summary

The statehood demand by the Karbis can be traced back since 1960 when the APHLC was formed. The conference demanded the Hill State by uniting all the hill tribes of North East India, then Assam. The Karbis actively participated in the movement for separate Hill State. After several stages of demanding statehood democratically through petitions and prayers it did not yield any fruitful result. And the aspiration of the Karbis was not met by New Delhi.

There were several factors responsible for the growth of Statehood demand by the Karbis. The great revolutionary and visionary leader Bishnuprashad Rabha, hailed the Karbis as the 'discoverer of Assam'.¹⁸² Though the Karbis were the first settlers to this part of the territory their language has been suppressed by the dominant language of the state. Till date no mechanism has come up from the Government of Assam to preserve and develop the language of indigenous tribals. Culturally, the Karbis are assimilated to the dominant culture and religion of the country. The Karbis began to forget their rich culture and tradition with the expansion of urbanization and living in multi-cultural society. The traditional administrative system and customary laws of the Karbis were neglected by the Government of Assam for which the proposal of opening customary law

¹⁸² Suren Baishya, *Bishnu Rabha Rachanavali*, Nalbari: Bishnu Rabha Sunwarani Gobeshona Samity, 1982, p.59

court in Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) has left non-functional. All these have brought the traditional practices and culture of the Karbis on the brink of extinction. Karbi are not Hindu by religion, they neither worship idols nor build temple. They worship the hills, mountains and spirit by appeasing with animal sacrifices. There was also unabated influx to Karbi Anglong for the past several decades. Permeation of people from mainland India and other illegal immigrant has not only affected the demographic equilibrium of the region but also caused massive destruction of rich biodiversity of the territory. Economically, the Karbis were left very poor inspite of rich and abundant resources due to lack of appropriate mechanism. All these have contributed the Karbis to go for vigorous Statehood demand. In the process, section of the nationalist leaders want to pressurize the Government on Karbi demand by taking recourse to arms movement for resolving the Karbi's problem once and for all. The Mikir Hills Nationalist Liberation Organization (MHNLO), the first ever Karbi militant group was formed in 1972 to strengthen the separate statehood demand for the Karbi tribe.